

Solemnity of Pentecost Year B

May 22-23, 2015 (Vigil: Genesis 11:1-9; Romans 8:22-27; John 7:37-39)

Readings: Acts 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7,12-13; John 15:26-27; 16:12-15

I tried to say it with all due respect and while remaining calm. As I approached the lady at the desk of the Sears office of the Drivers and Vehicle Office of the State of Minnesota I said simply, “There must be a mistake...my number says 52, and I see that the number showing on the illuminated sign is 77.” She was puzzled, as if to say, “And your point is?” “There cannot possibly be 75 or so people in front of me, could there,” I thought to myself?” Yes, in fact there were. This is not possible. I cannot possibly wait this long; this is ridiculous, I thought. I have things to do, places to go, lunch to eat.

We all want information, and we want it now! We have become accustomed to it. Now let us turn the clock back about 165 years. The 3000 Catholics in living in Minnesota were justifiably proud to learn that Pope Pius IX had named St. Paul to be a new diocese. For all too long, we had been taking marching orders from the Diocese of Dubuque, in Iowa! The decree was dated July 19, 1850. The beautiful fresco by the Dayton door depicts the arrival of Bishop Joseph Cretin in St. Paul, and is an idyllic scene. But truth be told, while Bishop Cretin did arrive in St. Paul in July, it was in 1851, one full year after the establishment of the Diocese!

It is all a matter of perspective. The Solemnity of Pentecost celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, a solemn sign that God would not abandon His Church, but rather would continue to guide it throughout the ages. **But there was a catch!** Jesus hints today that we must be willing to wait, to watch and to listen. [Vigil: “There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.”] “I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now.”

The experience of Pentecost was unparalleled in the early Church, and its defining moment in the aftermath of the resurrection. It was such a remarkable experience, as related in Acts of the Apostles, because people from all over the known regions, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Libya, Rome, all could hear the Galileans speaking in their own tongues of the mighty acts of God.

For Israel, Pentecost - celebration of the harvest - had become the celebration marking the conclusion of the Covenant on Mt Sinai. In the new covenant, Pentecost takes on a new meaning, drawing upon the old, yet building from it. It is here that Jesus said to the disciples, "I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now." In some respects these are frustrating words today, because for those who likes answers, this was Jesus' chosen manner in saying, "the Spirit will guide you to all truth," and guide you throughout the ages, but do not expect all the answers **right now!**

Jesus may have been trying to accomplish two things. First, he was preparing the apostles for his imminent Ascension. Secondly, he was signaling the manner in which the abiding presence of God would be manifest in the future. Jesus was an historical figure, who lived, breathed and taught in the midst of the people. God the Father signals all that is meant by Creator; Jesus prayed to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane; the heavenly Father speaks to us in the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is more elusive.

For people who prefer clear-cut answers, immediate service and the like, we become easily nervous. Yet, we should not fear, for the Holy Spirit is God, and God makes His presence known. This we believe in faith because God is true to His word. It is not a question of the first generation having more access to the voice of God; rather, God's voice is communicated in a different manner, one that requires something more of us.

In a way, God trusts us even more, because we live our lives without a direct eyewitness account of God's presence in the way the apostles had been privileged to see. The real challenge for the apostles was to trust that in fact they were **not** being abandoned after the Ascension; that the Lord was still very much present.

If we insist on a secular model for our relationship with God, we are doomed from the get-go. God is not at our beck and call, ready with immediate answers to our prayers and questions. Instead, the Holy Spirit was sent, and is still present in our lives today for guidance, even as we make full use of the natural and supernatural gifts freely given to us.

Note that before Jesus said to the disciples, "Receive the Holy Spirit," he twice said "Peace be with you." **Jesus wants us to feel secure**; he knows that we desire security for others and ourselves. He does not want us to be troubled. Jesus was letting the disciples go, slowly but surely. They were now capable of forging out on their own, for with the Holy Spirit present they were never really alone.

Now they would wait on God's Word, discerning through prayer God's mysterious ways. The Solemnity of Pentecost is a powerful reminder that God's care and concern for His people crosses all boundaries of language and race, nationality or age. He speaks to us all, in His own way, in His own time.