

Pentecost Sunday

June 3-4, 2017

Readings: Acts 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 12:3-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23

Each of us could name a few key moments that included a profound sense of power and awe, equally exhilarating and frightening. The day I received my Driver's License shortly after my 16th birthday was one example. Just as quickly, my exhilaration turned to fear as I drove to a high school football game the next evening, suddenly realizing that all my practice driving had been during the day. The glaring headlights of oncoming traffic really threw me for a loop. I grasped the wheel, white knuckled the entire way to the stadium.

Much more recently, in March I was crossing the Hillary Suspension Bridge in Nepal, enjoying the fresh air and incredible scenery. All was well until I made the mistake of looking down while halfway across. My excitement of being in the middle of a 500 foot long walking bridge perched 300 feet above the Dudh Kosi river turned my knees to jelly in an instant. What if a sudden wind gust came across the valley? I grasped for the side, only to see that there were jagged edges in the fencing, not to mention large holes. I did not make the same mistake a week later on my return; I wore gloves and never once looked down!

Still, it was a powerful adrenaline rush, as was reaching the goal of the trek several days later. The views as well as the grueling hiking literally took my breath away. Yet, once there, I was only thinking about how it was time to head back towards civilization and a warm shower! I spent little time taking it all in- I was already concerned about making it back in one piece!

Fear and exhilaration... It is not unusual that a mixture of emotions can be at play in the same person, even at the very same time. I suspect that the apostles felt a similar mixture of fear and power.

They spoke in different tongues, in what could only be an amazing experience. And yet, in the Gospel, hearkening back 50 days, we are told that they were behind locked doors out of fear. At some point, we must confront our fears rather than run away from them.

I myself have never exactly been a risk taker, and yet I am glad I stretched myself back in March. I could have gotten sick, or needed to be evacuated in a helicopter, things I witnessed several times. More likely, I could have felt ill enough to stop the climb and headed back without attaining the goal. None of that happened, owing to the grace of God more than anything.

But had I let fear overcome me, I never would have visited Asia for the first time, I never would have left my comfort zone of a daily diet Greek yogurt, Granola bars, fresh brewed coffee, provolone cheese and occasional chocolate bars. The Holy Spirit's presence enables us to go forth outside of all that is familiar, in order to encounter God's grace in new and exciting ways.

Had the apostles remained comfortable, they never would have engaged in apostolic missionary journeys, they never would have preached to the Gentiles. Paul would not have delivered his masterful speech to the learned in the Areopagus in Athens. The power of the Holy Spirit took them outside of themselves and opened new horizons.

But even there too, they were overpowered by the Holy Spirit—"Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you forgive..." Thus, the Solemnity of Pentecost is a powerful reminder of the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

In the Old Testament, the *ruah Yahweh*, lit. the “breath” of the Lord, descended upon leaders at the time of their anointing, and then on those chosen as prophets by the Lord. Prophets were called by God, sometimes unwillingly, but given the special graces to fulfill their roles in accordance with the will of God. The gift of the Spirit was later extended to the whole chosen people of God as a gift promised for the day of the Lord.¹ (cf. Joel 3:1 ff.)

For us today, so many centuries later, the meaning of Pentecost remains vital and empowering for all of us in the Church, working together, each according to our state in life. This forms the basis for “the supernatural appreciation of faith (*sensus fidei*) on the part of the whole people, when, from the bishops to the last of the faithful, they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals.”²

Together, we move forward in faith, trusting that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide the Church. Let us pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon both our leaders and upon all the faithful. Through Confirmation, we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit to guide and protect us, to empower us to be faithful and string witnesses in the world. May the Holy Spirit continue to enlighten the hearts and minds of all of God’s people.

¹ cf. Book of the prophet Joel 3:1 ff.

² Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium* 12; cf. St. Augustine, *De praed. sanct.* 14,27