

Solemnity of Pentecost
May 15, 2016

They were all in one place together

Readings: Acts 2:1-11; 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13; John 14:15-16, 23-26

Over the years, I have found it interesting to ask people to relate their earliest memories. It is true that some of our memories may in fact be the recollections of others telling us about past events, and we mistakenly think they are of the event itself. Not infrequently, the earliest recollections are of something traumatic, an event that sears itself into our memories. One early event in my life was anything but a false memory. It was very real. The date was June 30, 1967 and our family had gathered for my Father's Birthday party. Two months shy of my fourth birthday, I have vivid recollections.

A widespread and long-lived violent straight-line windstorm that was associated with a fast-moving band of severe thunderstorms swept across central Minnesota and reached the Twin Cities. I think they call them *derecho* ("deh-REY-cho") in the industry, or quasi-linear convective systems if you prefer meteorological precision.

It is distinguished from a severe thunderstorm storm due to its sustained winds, as opposed to gusts. It left severe damage in its wake, and the sound of that storm will forever be etched in my memory, especially the sirens. It ripped off the top 1/3 of our large Pine Tree, leaving a very oddly shaped conifer in the front yard for years to come.

But what I recall the most was the family all huddled together downstairs in the basement. My parents related that one of my grandmother's insisted on going home, and that she was sure she could make it in time. My father put the kibosh on those plans. There we were huddled together, all in one place. The extent of the damage was only discovered the next morning, and here our family album has the photographic evidence.

Yet in all these recollections, for some reason I do not recall being particularly scared. Perhaps I was, but the enduring memory is being huddled together; after all, my parents were there, so nothing bad was going to happen, or so I must have thought.

“And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were.” Our First Reading from Acts of the Apostles vividly describes the sustained wind that filled the entire house. I do not think it an insignificant fact that all the apostles were together in one place. Left alone, would the event have had the same effect? Left alone, would the apostles have received the same sense of a Commission for the work entrusted to them?

“Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.” Our Gospel verse is a cry for divine assistance, not for our daily Bread, but rather for a downpour, a torrent of heavenly grace to sustain us.

How appropriate a sentiment for all that we have been doing these past months, waiting and watching for a permanent shepherd. That prayer was officially answered with the appointment on Holy Thursday of Archbishop Hebda, and yesterday he officially took canonical possession of the Archdiocese, no longer the Archbishop-designate. Truly, it was an answer to our prayers.

Come, Holy Spirit, come!
And from your celestial home
Shed a ray of light divine!

These words from this morning’s Sequence, sung after the second reading, give voice to our longing. Truly a ray of divine light has shone. God has promised that we will never be left as orphans.

We are called to believe and trust that God hears and answers our prayers- that the promised Advocate will indeed be with us always. Today we recall that the Holy Spirit still guides the Church on this her birthday. Today's Solemnity is a liturgical last hurrah of sorts, as if we are asking for an outpouring that will sustain us for weeks and weeks to come here at the end of the greatest season of Easter.

But like the apostles, gathered together on the day of Pentecost, we acknowledge *par excellence* that we are strongest when we gather in prayer, seeking the unity to which we have called, united around Christ our Good Shepherd, united always in the gift of the Holy Spirit, truly our "soul's most welcome guest."

And in this month of May, lest us never forget that, as Acts of Apostles relates, following the Ascension, Mary prayed with the apostles in the upper room, awaiting the day of Pentecost. With her maternal intercession, may we doubly realize that we will never be left orphans.