

Pentecost Sunday
Homily ~ June 12, 2011

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A church-going family took a little girl who was visiting with them to church one Sunday. This girl had never been to church in her life but seemed to enjoy the experience. When they returned home and eating lunch, they asked the girl what she thought about the experience. She said she like it, but she was confused about one thing. She asked why the whole West Coast wasn't included. Nobody in the family knew what she was talking about. So she explained, "The man in the front kept talking about the Father, the Son and the whole-east coast."

God did not leave out the West Coast. God included everyone in the celebration of this day. Today we've gathered to celebrate Pentecost, the third most important feast of the Christian year.

On Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Christ and the entrance of the Divine into humanity. On Easter, we celebrate the sacrifice of the Son of God for the sins of the world and his resurrection from the dead, which promises us eternal life.

And today on Pentecost, we celebrate the birthday of the Church. It's the day the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit of Jesus, entered into the life of every believer. Pentecost is the day the earth was filled with the wind and fire of heaven.

The poet William Blake wrote a poem about Pentecost. Part of the poem says:

Unless the eye catch fire, God will not be seen.
Unless the ear catch fire, God will not be heard.
Unless the tongue catch fire, God will not be named.
Unless the heart catch fire, God will not be loved.
Unless the mind catch fire, God will not be known.

In his book, *A World to Love*, author George Knowles tells about a party of explorers who found themselves perplexed by something they found in a remote African jungle. In a clearing, they discovered 35 carefully laid fires that had never been lit. They had the appearance of 35 little tepees, with dry leaves surrounded by small, dry twigs and, finally, larger pieces of wood arranged in a good Boy Scout fashion.

Who built the fires? Why had not even one been lit? The mystery cleared up when the explorers saw dozens of chimpanzees watching from the trees. The chimps had watched campers and copied the art of fire building. But they had no fire.

Many people say the same kind of thing is true of the Church today. We have been trained in fire building, but we have no fire. If we are going to reach people today with the Christian message, faith must involve the head and the heart.

The century into which most of us were born (the 20th Century) showed a decline in an emphasis on the Holy Spirit. It also showed a steady decline in the membership of many churches. It is the Holy Spirit that empowers us to do God's work in the world.

Friends, we need the power of the Holy Spirit today. Look at the complexity in our world today with rival faiths that include radical Islam, as well as secularism, making claims of people's lives. Consider the enormous problems that the world faces—terrorism, economic hard times, environmental devastation, water shortages, and famine. Do you think we could make any dent in any of the problems with only our own power? If ever we needed the Holy Spirit working through us, it is today.

Not only do we need the power of the Holy Spirit as a church, we need the power of the Spirit in our individual lives. How do we live a life of integrity in a world where personal values are crumbling? How can we keep our commitments? How do we live a Christ-like life in a world that glorifies greed and materialism? Only one way, and that is to pray that Jesus' spirit will come into our lives and give us the courage, the conviction, and the compassion to be the kind of person that honors Jesus and imitates Jesus.

We are approaching the 100th anniversary of one of the most famous disasters in human history. On April 14, 1912, a signal of distress pierced the dark night of the North Atlantic in all directions from the magnificent but ill-fated ship, the *Titanic*. The *S.S. Californian* was the nearest ship to the scene of the accident. It would have required only about one-and-a-half hours for the *Californian* to reach the *Titanic* as it sank. Still, the *Californian* never reached the place where the *Titanic* sank.

In the investigation of the sinking of the *Titanic* in Washington, D.C., Senator William Smith of Michigan asked the commanding officer why the *S.S. Californian* didn't sail immediately to the scene of the accident when the wireless

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reached her. The officer shifted uncomfortably in the witness chair. Then he explained that they had feared icebergs, so they were lying motionless in the water. Even more importantly, they had extinguished their fires and had no steam up.

Such was the explanation given as why the *Californian*, which could have reached the *Titanic* before it sank, never got there and never rescued a single soul.

No fire, no power, no one rescued.

Could that be said about us? We have the form of religion but not its power. We bear the name of Christ, but we lack the power to be his people in the world today because we have neglected the Holy Spirit.


When I think of the Holy Spirit, I think of a follower of Jesus by the name of Teresa of Avila. She was a contemplative who renewed the Church and said that Christ has no body on earth but ours. No hands, but ours. Ours are the eyes with which he is to go about doing good. Ours are the hands with which he is to bless people. It is up to us now. We must become Jesus' hands, Jesus' feet, Jesus' eyes, Jesus' heart.

*Come, Holy Spirit, come.
Come into our hearts.
Fill us with your power
that we may renew
the face of the earth.*

Amen

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