

HOMILY

Pentecost Sunday *May 31, 2009*

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

A little girl was visiting her grandmother one beautiful spring morning. They walked out into grandmother's flower garden. As grandmother was inspecting the progress of her flowers, the little girl decided to try to open a rosebud with her own two hands. But no luck! As she would pull the petals open, they would tear or bruise or wilt or break off completely.

Finally, in frustration, she said, "Grandma, I just don't understand it at all. When God opens a flower it looks so beautiful; but when I try, it just comes apart."

"Well, honey," Grandmother answered, "there's a good reason for that. God is able to do it because He works from the inside out!"

He works from the inside out!

That is the great message of Pentecost. That is what the disciples finally came to understand. Remember, Jesus had ascended into heaven. And he told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit.

Here is where the story of Pentecost picks up. The disciples are back in the Upper Room waiting and wondering. Some are probably grumbling impatiently and nervously. What is this Holy Spirit business anyway? Maybe we misunderstood him.

Just then they heard a sound. The Breath of God began to blow on that place like the rush of a mighty wind. Images of fire danced around them. Suddenly, their fear was gone. Suddenly, they were filled with peace and confidence. With courage and strength and unity, they began to speak boldly. Amazingly, people from all different backgrounds heard and responded, and three thousand people were converted that day!

It's interesting to consider that the three classic symbols for the Holy Spirit in the Bible remind us of how God works through us and how God works from the inside out. Do you remember what they are?

FIRST THERE IS **BREATH** – The Symbol of Life

Remember in the Garden of Eden when God created Adam and Eve, he shaped them...but they were lifeless until he breathed into their nostrils the breath of life. They didn't really come alive until he breathed his spirit into them. Again, we see it here at Pentecost. The Breath of God, like the rush of a mighty wind, blew upon that place and the disciples came alive.

Listen! How is it with you this morning? Is God in your life? Is the Holy Spirit in your soul? Has God's spirit breathed on you the breath of real life? If not, you are not really living! You may be existing, coping. You may be floating along; but until the Holy Spirit comes into your heart, you are numbered among the lifeless. You are numbered among the walking dead.

The first sign of the Holy Spirit in the Bible is Breath, the symbol of life and zest and vitality. The kind of life created only by the presence of God. First, there is BREATH, the symbol of LIFE.

SECOND, THERE IS **FIRE** – The Symbol of Power

We often put those two words together, don't we? We talk about *firepower*. In the Bible, fire is often used as the symbol of God's presence and power. For example, we see it in the burning bush of Exodus and again here in the New Testament story of Pentecost.

But what I'm talking about is not the power of brute force or blatant intimidation...not the power of political clout or wealth or weapons. But rather it is the power of knowing God's presence in our lives and what that presence produces: integrity, honesty, commitment to a great cause, the sense of being God's co-worker, the assurance of God's love. There is nothing stronger than that. There's the fire power of Pentecost that fuels and mobilizes and energizes us, and enables us to do great things. Being totally convinced that God is with us and for us, and that he will ultimately win, and that nothing, not even death, can separate us from him, there is incredible power in that.

THIRD, THERE IS THE *DESCENDING DOVE* – The Symbol of Peace

The early Christians in creating this symbol were very wise to show the Dove descending because peace does indeed come from above. Inner peace—the poise, the serenity, the courage, the confidence to meet life and its troubles with steady eyes—comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Norman Neaves some years ago told about a teacher asking the students in her fourth grade class to name the person they considered the greatest person alive in the world today. Their responses were varied and interesting.

One little boy said, “I think it’s Joe Montana because he led the 49ers to all those Super Bowl wins.” A little girl said George Bush, and still another named Oprah. And on and on it went with the students mentioning a wide variety of celebrities.

But then it was little Donnie’s turn. Without hesitation Donnie said, “I think it’s Jesus Christ because he loves everybody and is always ready to help them.”

Mrs. Thompson, the teacher, smiled and said, “Well, I certainly like your answer, Donnie, because I’m a Christian, too, and I also admire Jesus very much. But there’s one slight problem. I said the greatest living person and, of course, Jesus lived and died two thousand year ago. Do you have another name in mind?”

I love the simple, innocent, confident, wide-eyed response of little Donnie. He said, “Oh, no, Mrs. Thompson, that’s not right at all. Jesus Christ is alive! He lives in me right now!”

That’s the good news of our faith and the message of Pentecost. God is with us right now working from the inside out, giving us the Breath of Life, the Fire Power of Commitment, and the Peace That Passes All Understanding.

