

Another year, another Pentecost. Another day of wearing the brightest, reddest blouse or bowtie we can find. Another hymn inviting the Holy Spirit to come, please, come. Another romp through the second chapter of Acts; another moment to contemplate what a tongue of fire might have looked like and whether or not you would actually want one resting anywhere near your head. Another chance to read through the litany of lands from which the pilgrims came: Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia; another chance to ask yourself what parts of Libya did belong to Cyrene, anyway, and why? Another opportunity to hear our prayers in many different languages; another year, another Pentecost.

Most of us have known Pentecosts before; some of us have known 98 of them. And while our circumstances change from year to year, the truth is that except for switching out the red jacket we're wearing this year, for the most part, we don't expect Pentecost to ever be much different. We know what this day is about, and so we come

prepared for the same old feast. We like this feast – it's a particularly fun one that doesn't require staying up until midnight or giving something up for 40 days beforehand – but we don't expect it to do much. We treat it like an old familiar friend, like a brightly colored bird that we let out of its cage once a year, but we don't expect it to change much, and we don't expect it to change us. Most of us, including those of us here who perhaps have never experienced Pentecost before, probably didn't show up this morning expecting Pentecost to make much of a difference.

Would it shock you to hear that it was much the same for the disciples? Another year, another Pentecost. They may have called it by its Hebrew name, Shavuot, but it was a feast they knew well. Another Shavuot, another chance to celebrate the wheat harvest. Another chance to carefully count the 50 days after Passover. Another pilgrimage from Judea or Cappadocia to Jerusalem. Another ascent to the temple to present your *Bikkurim*, your first-fruits, to the Lord.

Another day to make bread and offer it upon the altar. Another year, another Shavuot, another Pentecost.

Like us, the disciples had known Pentecosts before. And while their circumstances had changed dramatically this year after following Jesus to Jerusalem, watching him be arrested and crucified, and then spending 40 miraculous days with him after he was raised from the dead, they didn't seem to be expecting this Pentecost to be much different. They weren't outside watching the heavens for a sign of a heavenly dove. They weren't assembling crowds of people in the town center or in the wilderness or in the synagogue to witness the Holy Spirit as she made her spectacular appearance. Jesus had told them in the moments before his ascension that he would send the Holy Spirit to baptize them "not many days from now," but they didn't seem to find that timeline particularly pressing. They were inside, alone, not praying, not looking, not even necessarily waiting – just sitting and kind of expecting the same old feast. They didn't expect this Pentecost

to make much of a difference.

They were, of course, tremendously surprised. Their Pentecost ended up being anything but the same old same old. This particular Pentecost went down in the history books as the greatest Pentecost of all time. But now, all these centuries later, our Pentecost seems rather tame. Our bright red vestments are fairly bold, but they're hardly surprising. What difference does this day really make? What is the point of Pentecost, except remind us of the third person of the Trinity just in time for Trinity Sunday? What does Pentecost do for us, for the church, and for the world? We show up on this day because we're faithful and we love the Church and we try to be faithful followers of Jesus – but I'd wager that most of us didn't show up because we expected the Holy Spirit to actually do something.

Why is it that we have such low expectations for Pentecost? Is it because we think if we don't hear the sound of roaring wind or see fire dancing above our heads then the Holy Spirit isn't here at all? Or

is it because we think that if we don't feel something dramatic then she isn't moving within us? The Church's language can lead us to imagine that an experience of the Holy Spirit must always be something that we feel deeply, something that overwhelms and subsumes us. Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire, and lighten with celestial fire. Hearing the words of our Pentecost hymns you'd think we should all leave this church glowing, walking down Kenmore with our feet two inches off the ground. Inspire us, Holy Spirit. Come down upon us, move within us – all of this language, while beautiful and appropriate, sets a high bar for what an experience of the Holy Spirit is “supposed” to feel like. If we imagine that the only indicator of the presence of the Holy Spirit is an emotional earthquake, a shattering soul-moment, then no wonder we don't expect much of Pentecost. Because really, how many of us will leave today's Mass glowing? How many of us will speak in heretofore-unknown languages? How many of us will weep or laugh or speak in tongues?

How many of us will be aflame with inspiration...and how many of us will just go to brunch? How many of us will be moved only to snag an extra piece of birthday cake at coffee hour? Really, how many of us will leave this place truly forever changed and how many of us will leave feeling mostly the way we did when we came in? How many of us will feel like the Holy Spirit really made a difference?

But the Holy Spirit is not just about things wild and windy. Yes, the Holy Spirit can be inspiring. Yes, the Holy Spirit can set us aflame with the love of God, move us to tears, fill our hearts and make them Christ's. I hope we all have at least one of those experiences of the Holy Spirit in our lives. But Pentecost reminds us that the Holy Spirit doesn't need that kind of emotional response to get her work done. For the Holy Spirit comes first and foremost to translate. She is a translator. When the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, the Acts of the Apostles doesn't tell us about how they felt, but what they did. We don't know how they felt. We don't know if Simon the

Zealot spoke with a little more zeal, or if James the Less felt a little less. The Holy Spirit didn't descend upon the disciples to make them feel a particular way but to make them act in a particular way. Her job was to get them up and out of that room, out into the streets, translating the Gospel into as many languages as needed to be heard.

Which is exactly her job for us this morning. Even if we aren't feeling particularly inspired or spiritually aflame, we can still feel how Pentecost makes a difference. All we need do is get up from our pews, get out of this room, out into the rest of our lives, and translate the Gospel into as many languages as need to be heard. English, Spanish, Arabic. Life-long Roman Catholic, evangelical, lapsed Episcopalian. Grandmother, toddler, teenager. The language of the office, the language of the coffee shop, the language of city hall. The language of poetry, the language of politics, the language of prison. The language that we speak when we are with our family, our friends, a stranger we just met on the sidewalk. The languages of life – as many languages

as we need in order to be heard.

This is the difference the Holy Spirit makes on Pentecost. She makes us good translators; she helps us to say the same old words we've always said – about loving one another as Christ loved us, about respecting the dignity of every human being, about praying, celebrating, repenting, and forgiving – but to say them in the languages of those who are not here yet, of those crowds out there who are longing to hear about God's deeds of power. Whether she comes upon us like a roaring wind or draws close like a whisper, the Holy Spirit empowers us to speak of the love of God in a way that others might hear and understand. This is what she is doing today; this is what she has always been doing. So in a way, I suppose, we were right all along: this Pentecost is just another Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is here translating, just as she always has been. She is here, making a difference, just as she always has been. She is here to make the difference, and that difference, my friends, is you.

*Preached by Mother Erika Takacs*

*Pentecost 2019*

*Church of the Atonement, Chicago*