

## Thought for the Week

God grant me the serenity to accept the people I cannot change, the courage to change the one I can, and the wisdom to know it's me. ~Author unknown, variation of an excerpt from "The Serenity Prayer" by Reinhold Neibuhr



**A Pentecost Reflection:** The Jews were gathered for their celebration of Pentecost that is seven weeks after celebrating the Passover. It was an agricultural festival of giving thanks for the early crop. Some of those Jews had become followers of Jesus and of course, as Jews, they were to come to Jerusalem for the feast. What we hear in the First Reading is the surprising event of a Holy Wind and Fire Storm. This Spirit's coming brings about great changes in the lives of those early "inspired" Jews. The ability to speak and understand different languages is only the first. They were enabled to understand and speak to the differences within the human community. As they were gathered together to give thanks to God for the abundance of the fields, these men and their followers were to spread the news "of the mighty acts of God." Through the Acts of the Apostles, we read of these "mighty acts of God" which present a new sense of Pentecost.

The earth brings forth harvested grain through the planting of human hands and the sun and rain from the skies. The new Pentecost is our celebrations of how God's Spirit sent from the skies, brings forth a harvest of good works through the cooperation of human hands. In a sense, the Church is a "Pentecost". It remains a gathering to give thanks for the abundance of "mighty acts of God" which are breathed into the human structure of the Church and into its members. We ponder, sing of, write about, and proclaim that God's Spirit is faithful to God's continuous creation. The Second Reading holds a wonderful physical image expressing the work of the Holy Spirit. The human body has many parts. The human Church, the human race both have many aspects. The Church, like the human body, does many different things, but when guided by the spirit, it becomes the Body of Christ. As our face can reveal an aspect of our total person, so each of us reveals something of the Person and mystery of God. What a great way to really live!!

A great way not to live is hiding for fear. The Gospel pictures John's view of how the Pentecost took place. Locked in, not even a real gathering, the remnant-ten seem to be sitting in separation. Jesus rises in their midst and breathes the Spirit upon their fragmentation after the greeting of peace. His presence removes their absence and they rejoice to hear his words and see the signs of his glory. As with all his encounters with the broken, lost and hurt, Jesus meets them with their pasts, in their now-times, but has a future-eye for their lives. Mission! Jesus meets them, the early Church and has a Reconciliation Service right on the spot. He then says, "I do not retain your sins, so whose sins are you going to retain?" He will tell them that as he has been *sent* to them, they are *sent* out and into and for this world he came to redeem. What a way to live!

The work of the Holy Spirit is to make holy flesh, incarnation, that is. We remember the story in the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel where he was taken out into a valley covered with bones. God's breath moved over this semi-cemetery And flesh recovered the bones and the bodies recovered life. This yearly celebration recalls the present, now-happening, breathing of God's Spirit among us. In our part of the northern hemisphere grass, flowers, trees, berries and the ever-present dandelions are all in bloom. The warming breezes, have brought our dead lands to life. It is this wonderful event of God's continually bringing us back- up- to more life which is nature's celebration. It is our celebration as well.

The Holy Spirit "overshadowed" the empty womb of Mary "and there was Light", but more, the Light Made Flesh. That same Spirit is sent to "overshadow" us and bring our flesh into that same "light" and "Life" and bring forth the Flesh of Jesus again and again. As our Jewish ancestors planted the crops and relied on God to give the increase, so do we, so does the Church in our times. The Spirit gives life through us to whom the Spirit has also given life. We plant the seeds and God's Spirit, like the warm breezes, brings forth a new abundance of life. Jesus is still breathing his Spirit upon us and continually urges us to "Mission!" and give life by forgiving and then giving life through the holiness of the always-recovering, Spirit-charged holy flesh of our bodies.

"There lives the dearest freshness deep down things  
because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
world broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings."  
God's Grandeur G. M. Hopkins, S.J. 1877 (Larry Gillick, S.J.)

## Pentecost in Paint



A collection of individuals fills this painting, signifying Mary and the first followers of Jesus. They are looking in different directions at the moment when the great whooshing wind and the flames of the Holy Spirit come down upon them. Caught up in the movement of the wind and flames, they are pushed forward into a celebration that is turned outward, and toward the darkness that lies beyond. The fire of the Spirit blows in and through them, not just around and over them. And they are swept forward into the future, in common mission.

We have a challenge imagining this moment. Our culture emphasizes the particularity of personal experience, and differences between us. We hear much talk about diversity and inclusion, which might reflect a positive regard for community. But it may also reflect an assumption that, apart from our efforts to bring people together, we are separate and disconnected. Perhaps, on the day of Pentecost, some of the people dramatically experienced God's power. But we may be surprised to hear that *all* of them did, and together!

We don't appreciate how community is vital to individual human flourishing. We often want individual freedom without personal accountability to others, and individual opportunity without personal responsibility. Being in community with other people may seem to be occasionally beneficial, especially when it is on our terms. But we don't see it as *essential* to our lives.

In the ancient biblical vision, we are created in community, and we are redeemed in community. Whether we experience it or not, after Baptism God abidingly dwells between us and within us. There is no distance between us and God, even if we perceive a disconnection within ourselves. Whether we are conscious of it or not, God pours out grace to us in revelation and in inspiration. This is why God encourages us to open ourselves in prayer to his abundant gifts. *All* are blessed, for all receive a full measure of the Holy Spirit in Baptism. And all are commissioned by the fire of the Holy Spirit to engage in mission wherever we are, at home, at school, at work or at play. All are called to share in the beauty of Christ in community.