

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Pentecost Sunday, May 19-20, 2018, Cycle B

With the great Solemnity of Pentecost Sunday, we come to the close of our Easter celebration. As we all know, the word "Pentecost" derives from a Greek word meaning "fifty." For fifty days now we have celebrated and proclaimed that Jesus is the Risen Lord who has broken the chains of sin and death forever. With Pentecost, though, we do not stop proclaiming our joy in the Risen Lord, but we shift our focus on being empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the Church of Jesus sent forth on mission to proclaim this Risen Lord to the world.

In the scriptures, the spirit is portrayed as a powerful driving force that makes things happen. The creation story of Genesis tells us that the Spirit of God was like a "mighty wind." By the overwhelming power of this Spirit, God brought order out of chaos. The Acts of the Apostles says of this Spirit: "...suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind. ... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." The power of the Holy Spirit is a stupendous force – a force so powerful that the creation of the world happens, and at Pentecost the creation of the Church. The Greek word for spirit is "pneuma," but the Hebrew word seems to get at the meaning of "Spirit" much better – "ruah" the roughness of the word ("ruah") itself – and actually having to practically breathe the word out, "ruah" – gives you a real feel for what the Hebrew Scriptures are trying to get at about the power of the Spirit.

The Gospel of John tells us that the Risen Jesus breathed "ruah" this Spirit upon his Apostles and disciples and said: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Jesus also promises that his Spirit will flow from the hearts of believers like streams of living water to transform the desert into paradise.

And the Pentecost Story from the Acts of the Apostles reveals how true it is – that streams of living water will flow from believers beginning the transformation of the desert of our world into the paradise of God's Kingdom. Once filled with the Holy Spirit, the Acts of the Apostles tells us the Apostles went forth and preached the Good News, speaking in different tongues – so that Jews from different parts of the Roman Empire understood the Good News. The Power of the Spirit released by the Risen Lord when he breathed on His disciples is such that the effects of the Tower of Babel in the book of Genesis are reversed. If you remember, in the Tower of Babel story – the people became confused in their languages thus causing division and separation – the Good News of the Pentecost story is that the Holy Spirit is the language that can unite us into one people – heal division, and bring an end to conflict. The Spirit uses diversity as a means to bring about a true unity!

Which means that the “mighty wind” of the Spirit does not obliterate our differences – the Acts of the Apostles say the Apostles still spoke in different tongues. Rather, the Power of the Spirit is such that we are enabled to use our different gifts, our various abilities for the sake of the Good of All. As St. Paul says: “There are different gifts, but the one Spirit, different ways of serving, but one Lord, different workings, but one and the same God who produces all gifts.” To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of the one Body – in short, to bring about the paradise of the One Kingdom of God. Indeed as the Spirit brought order out of chaos at the Creation of the Universe, so as the Church is born into being, the Spirit breathes order into the chaos of our Tower of Babel.

The Miracle of the “Tongues” of different languages at the First Pentecost was the initial step of the Spirit healing a divided and sinful humanity. The challenge that faced the first Christians gathered in Jerusalem, at the birth of the Church, is still our challenge today as followers of Jesus. Into each new generation, the Risen Lord breathes forth His Spirit (ruah) and commissions us: “As the Father sent me, so I send you.” The mission of unity entrusted to us and we need the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit! And so on this Pentecost, as we go forth in obedience to our Risen Lord, we pray: “Come, Holy Spirit, Come! And Renew the face of the earth.”