

Pentecost
5/19/2024

A THREEFOLD CELEBRATION

Today's feast of Pentecost represents a threefold celebration with roots long before the coming of Christ.

On a natural level, Pentecost represents the bounty of the earth. In Palestine, crops would begin to ripen in May and Pentecost is the celebration of the first fruits, the first of the crops to be harvested. It's a reminder of the goodness of God expressed in the land providing people with food to help preserve life. This has been called, *the interplay between heaven and earth*. It's a call to thanksgiving, a call to be grateful. It reminds us that we are part of creation and that we're to care for creation.

On a Jewish level, Pentecost represents the fiftieth day since Passover. At Passover, the celebration was from the slavery in Egypt into freedom. At Pentecost, the Jewish people celebrate the giving of the law, the receiving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. It is true to say that the road to the promised land passed by Mount Sinai. The Hebrew word for law, *torah*, is richer than our understanding of law. To us, law means rules but *torah* means more. It's God's instruction, God's teaching, God's word to us.

The Israelites could rejoice, because unlike their pagan neighbors, they knew what God wanted them to do. *Torah* isn't an obstacle to happiness but something to be desired as something leading to happiness. As with Passover, this was a time when many Jews went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem as our first reading reminds us. So by the time of Christ, Pentecost was already an established Jewish feast.

And that leads to the third level, the Christian level, the level of the Holy Spirit. Fifty days after the Christian Passover, after Easter, after the time when in his Paschal Mystery Jesus passed from life through death into new life, the Holy Spirit was poured forth on the infant Church. That's when the Church received the New Law which is love and that seeks to unite all people into the New Covenant of Christ. That new law brings the old law to fulfillment.

Before and after his resurrection, Jesus spoke about the coming of the Holy Spirit. At the Ascension, Jesus gave a mission, to make disciples of the whole world and a promise, that the Holy Spirit would come to lead them. The law had already been received, they were now to receive the Holy Spirit.

Among his words about the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit *would remind them of what he said*. You could say that this is part of how the Holy Spirit works. When we find ourselves holding onto a grudge, we can be reminded, forgive us our trespasses and as we forgive those who trespass against us. When we find ourselves starting to hate, we can be reminded, *love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*. When we tend to ignore someone in need, we can be reminded, *what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me*. When we're tempted to lash out with our words or gossip, we can be reminded, *by your words you will be condemned*. If something is of the Holy Spirit, it will somehow, in some way, be connected to Jesus and if it's not, there may be reason to doubt it and to ask if it's simply a projection of our own wants.

The Spirit that hovered over the waters of creation, is the same Holy Spirit that the Apostles received, and the Holy Spirit that we receive in the sacraments, particularly baptism and confirmation. The Holy Spirit comes to unite or as we hear in one prayer, our goal is to become, *one body, one spirit in Christ*.

We believe that the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, continues to be at work today in the Church and in our own lives. There are two that God the Father has sent: the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the person of Jesus, God entered into the world in a very real and visible way. In the person of the Holy Spirit, God enters into the world in a very real and *invisible* way. We have to believe that somehow, some way, the Holy Spirit is at work in the life of the Church. Now we can certainly mess things up and history is filled with such examples. Although we always strive to allow the Holy Spirit to work through us, it is comforting to know that the Holy Spirit can work in spite of us, even when we make mistakes.

The Holy Spirit is at work in the life of the Church and our own lives. The Holy Spirit is at work in the Eucharist. The Holy Spirit comes to unite. The Holy Spirit came when the infant Church was gathered together, in other words, united. The evil one works to divide, the Holy Spirit comes to unite; to guide us in living lives of intentional faith in every *little way*.

In this threefold celebration of Pentecost, we remember the goodness of God expressed in the first fruits of the harvest. We remember the gift of *torah*, particularly the Ten Commandments, which forms part of our Jewish heritage. And most importantly of all, we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit and being at work, reminding us of the words of Jesus, and continuing to be at work in the Church and in our lives. We ask for the grace to have hearts that are open and awake to the working of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives; to lead us to the fulness of life, love and joy that the Holy Spirit shares with the Father and the Son, God forever and ever. Amen.