

Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11
1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13
John 20:19-23

In April, I gave a presentation to the WV Counseling Association on the Role of Spirituality in the Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress. As a priest and psychotherapist, I find myself in a wonderful place where I can draw on both theology and psychology. As I focused on the distinction between faith and belief, I quoted the philosopher Alan Watts. "Faith is a state of openness or trust. To have faith is to trust yourself to the water. When you swim you don't grab hold of the water, because if you do you will sink and drown. Instead, you relax and float. And the attitude of faith is the very opposite of belief, of holding on. In other words, a person who is fanatic in matters of religion, and clings to certain ideas about the nature of God and the universe, becomes a person who has no faith at all. Instead they are holding tight. But the attitude of faith is to let go, and become open to truth, whatever it might turn out to be."

We like to refer to this Feast of Pentecost as the birthday of the Church. The gift of the Holy Spirit brought the disciples out of themselves, out of their fear, from hiding into the open, from darkness to light. The Holy Spirit drew the disciples out into the world where they would now be the very presence of Christ Jesus, where the gospel that Jesus taught would become visible and begin to transform we human people into what God intended. Left to our own devices we tend to fall back into fear, we withdraw to a protective mode. The Holy Spirit beckons us to shake off the fear, to see that we are a part of something much more and wonderful, to take care of all God created and most especially to take care of one another. I would like to say that the Holy Spirit invites us to see creation, the world, and fellow human beings as living in harmony with each other. And so, our life journey is a movement from the ego self to the spirit self, from who I am in myself and who I am in the Spirit.

Often times we have the mistaken idea that the Holy Spirit was given to the Church, but the opposite is actually what happened and continues to happen. We are given over to the Holy Spirit. Without a focus on the Holy Spirit, the Church is pretty caught up in teachings and pronouncements and doctrines. All too often the Church is caught up in survival mode. These teachings that define a church or religion are important. There is no question about it, they are important, but a church or religion is meant to be more than an institution trying to survive. The Holy Spirit beckons us to so much more, to be a dynamic presence in the world, to have our focus on the truth. We are a Christ-centered-religion, and so, we are convinced that Jesus is the Christ, leading us into the fulness of truth. Jesus gave his disciples to the Spirit, that they might continue to be formed in the gospel teaching for which Jesus lived and ultimately gave his life.

The synod gatherings that many of us participated in over the past three months was initiated by Pope Francis who wanted us to be aware of the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives of faith. We came together that we might listen to one another. Most often

when we sit down with one another we already have an idea what this or that person might be thinking, what they might have to say. The objective in coming together was that we might be “curious.” I love that word because when we are “curious” the judgment or fear fall away. We are more interested in learning from the experience of that other person. And thus, the purpose of the synodal process was first to be aware of the Holy Spirit, and second to trust that the Holy Spirit will lead us to become more genuinely a community of faith.

In the last few days, I was listening to the news and a person of some significance was lamenting that we are living through a great deal of chaos with the war in Ukraine, the gun violence here in our country, the death of innocent men, women, and children. This author who has written extensively on teenage suicide, suggests that the chaos can lead us to creativity. I would like to say that the gift of the Holy Spirit that we celebrate today, can lead us to something wonderful, if only, we are open and willing to listen to one another.

We have pondered the sacred word, we turn to the altar and celebrate Eucharist, and we are out the door and into a new week. Though our many encounters this week, may we be aware of the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit.