

Pentecost Sunday (C)

June 7, 2019

**Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11
1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13
John 14:15-16, 23b-26**

This past week, I was on retreat with the priests of the diocese. There were some 90 priests and I understand that 40% of the priests serving this diocese are foreign born, coming from India, the Philippines, and the African continent. The Holy Spirit is truly needed in the church in West Virginia because the people say they cannot understand the preaching. I have come to know a few of these priests and they are wonderful individuals but their command of the English language is a challenge for them and for the people.

On Wednesday afternoon, we learned that Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore had posted a letter to the priests and the people of the diocese. The report that he sent to the Vatican regarding our former bishop has become public through a Washington Post article. The focus was upon what was described as credible sexual abuse by Bishop Bransfield and his inappropriate use of diocesan monies. The response of the priests was somewhere between sadness and overwhelming anger. I was grateful to be with the priests, to hear their thoughts, and to offer support to one another. There are those of us who have a great deal of ownership of the church in this diocese and there are those who are serving, assisting the church. Some feel this betrayal of leadership more deeply than others.

This is a very sad moment for the priest and the people of the Church in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. Our faith is in Jesus, the gospel word, and the people of the church. Our trust has been in the leadership of the institution and it has been betrayed. There are those who have left and will leave the church. I pretty much understand why some choose to leave and I am grateful for those who choose to remain.

Within this setting of the past week, we come together to celebrate the feast of Pentecost. Fifty days ago we celebrated the Easter Triduum and throughout this season we have been reminded that we are a baptized and listening people. That is we are drenched with

water and word. We have been born again! We are being born again! The day of Pentecost is referred to as the birthday of the church. This day is also the birth of “being church” where we dare to live the life of Christ. The refreshing water of baptism brings us into Christ Jesus. The Spirit present in the sacred word instructs us with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. The Spirit present in the sacred word, the Sacraments, and the people of God forms us in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and generosity. It is terribly important for the church to always see itself in formation, coming to birth. We are very human and our failures get in the way and the church languishes. With minds and hearts open to the Holy Spirit, the people of God must demand changes in the leadership of the church. As we learn from the failures of our former bishop, we can be born again as church and genuinely live the gospel of Christ.

Hildegard of Bingen, a remarkable woman of the 12th century was an advisor to many bishops, popes, and kings. I conclude my homily with her “Antiphon for the Holy Spirit.”

The spirit of God
is a life that bestows life,
root of the world tree
and wind in its boughs.
Scrubbing out sins,
she rubs oil into wounds.

She is glistening life,
alluring all praise,
all-awakening,
all-resurrecting.

(From *Symphonia*, translated and edited by Barbara Newman, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 141.)

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Presider: Let us pray for the Spirit to continue to renew the face of the Earth.

Our response: O God, we praise your name!

- 1. For the church / may it rise above problems, scandals and power struggles / and be an unambiguous sign of the Spirit's presence for the world // We pray ...**
- 2. For those who have been clear signs of God's peace, presence and forgiveness // for leaders, teachers, healers, pastors and ordinary faithful disciples // We pray ...**
- 3. For those who touch us today in ways known only to us / who bring love and peace / clarity and forgiveness / sustenance and hope // We pray ...**
- 4. For those who use wealth, power or notoriety as false claims of the Spirit's presence // and for those who denigrate the small, but powerful ways in which the Spirit touches lives // We pray ...**
- 5. For those who feel abandoned by God — refugees, the poor, forgotten, lonely and disenfranchised // for all who suffer / may they know that God hears their distress and holds them close // We pray ...**
- 6. In gratitude for the many gifts bestowed on this community / and for the courage to offer our own gifts for the good of others / We pray ...**
- 7. For our departed family and friends and for all who mourn their loss, especially _____ // We pray ...**

The parish community would like to support you in prayer.

Please share with us your needs and intentions.

Presider: Gracious God, we are ever in need of renewal as individuals, as a church and as a human community. Hear these prayers and open us to the Spirit's power. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who sends us forth. Amen.

Lord Jesus,

you were present to your disciples when they were hiding in fear:

Lord, have mercy.

you shared your peace and breathed the Spirit upon them:

Christ, have mercy.

you are present to us now with the same Spirit and peace:

Lord, have mercy.