

Homily for Pentecost Sunday

June 4, 2006

Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104; 1 Cor 12:3-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23

Homilist: *S. Benilda Desmond, O.P.*

Today we celebrate the birth of the Church. It has been said that the Church is a community of sinners who put their hope for happiness in Christ. A wise Christian was asked by an unbeliever what one had to be and do to be considered Catholic, and she answered, "You have to be a sinner who knows your Savior is Jesus and your hope for happiness is in the saving power of His death and rising." Note that one has to acknowledge oneself as sinner. Every true Christian is acutely aware of his need for transformation.

In a sense all the mysteries of the Catholic faith come together in this celebration of the coming of the Spirit. Belief in the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Easter mystery form the basis for belief in the descent of the Spirit. The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus breathed His Spirit into the Church on the day of His Resurrection. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, pinpoints the day of Pentecost as the moment when the overwhelming power of Christ's Spirit seized upon the community and the Church was born amidst the enthusiasm and energy surrounding the first preaching and conversions. What is clear is that the early Church was very conscious of the penetrating power of the Spirit of Jesus to transform the believer.

We see the transformation in the persons of the Apostles who from a state of paralyzing fear emerged into almost an ecstatic preaching of their faith in the person of Jesus. Gone is the timid secretive band of followers. These Galilean fishermen and peasants cry out challenging the authorities and powers of Jerusalem with the accusation: "You killed the Prince of Life!" They place before their startled fellow citizens their faith in Jesus raised from the dead in order to give life to all in search for truth.

The Second Reading opens up to us the wonders that the Spirit does within each Christian. Each one is moved and empowered to enter into a ministry that expands, energizes and serves the Church. Each ministry is different and suited to the gifts and talents of each member and so the work of transformation begins.

And here we are today—remembering that explosion of the Spirit so long ago and even witnessing it today in our own Christian communities and across our world. The celebration of the feast energizes each of us to allow the Spirit into our own lives—to transform us to become other Christs, to bring His Spirit into our own world.