May 30 & 31, 2020 Fr. Frederick D. Daley

Feast of Pentecost All Saints Parish, Syracuse, NY

We are neither Closed nor Alone

It seems that up to that that fiftieth day after Easter, the disciples had been very pious: The Gospel tells us that they went back to Jerusalem after Jesus’ ascension as he told them to. They were seen in the Temple every day, praising God with their “hallelujahs” and “praise the Lords.” After worship in the Temple, they came together in that upper room to commemorate Jesus, tell and retell endless stories about him and break their bread together in honor of him.

As for the rest of the time, they did not seem to do very much. Without the recognition of the Spirit nothing much happened. Jerusalem did not notice them, the country didn’t pay any attention to them, business as usual continued…

In many ways the harrowing events of the passion and death of Jesus, mixed with the joy and yet confusion of the resurrection, had left them paralyzed in the house of fear; not really knowing what to do next… and if that was the rest of the story — there probability would not have been a ‘Jesus Movement’ and, ultimately, a Christian religion and Jesus would have been hardly a dot in the books of history.

Brothers and sisters, it was at the moment the Spirit descended on them that they and everything else starting to change: they *caught fire* – *divine fire* – and they went off to preach, to heal and to change the world in the name of Jesus.

Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest and author, images the Pentecost event in a powerful way:

“When Jesus let go of his last breath, that breath hovered in the air in front of him for a moment and then it was set loose on earth. It was such a pungent breath — so full of passion – so full of life – that it didn’t simply dissipate as so many breaths do. It grew in strength and volume, until it was a mighty wind, which God sent spinning up through that upper room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. God wanted to make sure that Jesus’ friends were the inheritors of Jesus’ breath and it worked!”

Those disciples, moping and wondering what to do without Jesus, heard a holy hurricane headed their way. Before they could defend themselves – that mighty wind had blown through the entire house, striking sparks that burned into flames above their heads and they were filled with it — *every one of them* was filled to the gills with God’s own breath!

Brothers and sisters, before that day was over, the church had grown from 120 to over 3000! Shy people had become bold, scared people became gutsy, and lost people and found a sure sense of direction. When the disciples opened their mouths to speak – they sounded like Jesus, when they laid hands on the sick – it was as if Jesus himself had touched them. In short order they were doing things they had never seen anyone but him do and there was no explanation except that they had dared to inhale on the day of Pentecost! They had sucked-in God’s own breath and they had been transformed by it!

The Holy Spirit entered into them the same way she had entered into Mary, the mother of Jesus – and for the same reason: it was time for God to be born again: not in one individual body this time, but in *a body of believers* who would receive the breath of life from the Lord and pass it on using their own bodies to distribute the gift! For over 2000 years, we call this body of believers The Church… and here *we are that Body!*

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Sisters and brothers, on the Feast of Pentecost 2020 – fondly called the birthday of the Church – we, the baptized, are faced with the vital question of our faith: are we – The Church – living as the disciples did *before* Pentecost or *after* Pentecost? Another way of putting it in the midst of this global pandemic: are we going to huddle in fear in the upper room, paralyzed by what lies ahead of us…? wondering if it can ever be the way it was before? *OR*: as Pope Francis challenges us, how might this painful moment be an opportunity to let the Holy Spirit pour her creative breath upon us to dream and create something new?

Well, that is certainly a challenge for the global Church, but I have no doubt what our answer is here at All Saints. First of all: the fact that our church building and the Bishop Harrison Center have been for the most part shut down since March 18th in no way means The Church has been closed! As the widely shared words of Deon K. Johnson, Bishop-elect of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Missouri, powerfully articulate:

*“The work of the church is essential.*

 *The work of caring for the lonely the marginalized and the oppressed is essential.*

 *The work of speaking truth to power and seeking justice is essential.*

 *The work of being a loving, liberating, and life-giving presence in the world is*

 *essential.*

 *The work of welcoming the stranger, refugee and the undocumented is essential.*

 *The work of reconciliation and healing and caring is essential.*

 *The Church does not need to “open” because The Church never “closed.” We who*

 *make up the Body of Christ - The Church - love God and our neighbors and ourselves*

 *so much that we will stay away from our buildings until it is safe. We are The Church.”*

We continue to live the Gospel — ministry has continued so many ways:

* remote liturgies,
* Parish outreach,
* food pantries,
* refugee welcoming,
* support of our Sanctuary family,
* sandwich-making,
* gardening,
* mask-making,
* funerals and baptisms,
* faith formation,
* small faith group and Bible Study Zoom Meetings… etc., etc.
* and now: Parking- lot liturgy!

As we move forward, let us pray that our hearts be open to receive the breath of the Spirit – who is within and among us.

Don't forget those words of Jesus:

“I won't leave you alone. Another helper will be given to you – a helper from within you: the Holy Spirit! She will help you in everything; she will help you from within; she will help you to do all I did for you, and even greater things!”

Amen!the disciples had been very