

## Commentary to the Feast of Pentecost

### Solemnity of Pentecost: All Different All One



When I think of Pentecost Sunday, I have to remember Pentecost of 1984. I was a young priest then, visiting Rome with my parents. I was able to assist Pope John Paul II at the solemn Pentecost Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. It was just me and the Pope, and about 65 other priests, a dozen or so cardinals, an assortment of bishops and about 10,000 people. Boy did I behave! There is quite a lot I could tell you about the experience, but what really hit me was the universality of the Church. The priests who assisted were from all over the world. The Pope gave his homily in several languages and then confirmed people from all over the world. I was and still am fascinated by the way that we are so different one from the other; yet we are all the same in our faith.

When on Pentecost Sunday the Apostles first proclaimed the Christian message, they presented the

Gospel to people from all over the world yet were heard speaking in their own languages. The Greeks heard the message in Greek, the Persians in Farsi, the Romans in Latin, the Jews in Hebrew or Aramaic, etc. Although the people who heard the message were from all over, the message itself united them into one people. This was and is the work of the Holy Spirit, forming us into One Person, the Body of Christ. Thus St. Paul tells the Corinthians, "We are all different, we have different gifts, we do different things, but we are united in the Holy Spirit into One Body."

Pluralism is not an exception in the Church, it is the norm. As an example of pluralism I offer the type of experiences that we had right here in the United States. There are Hispanic Catholics, Black Catholics, and White Catholics, Asian Catholics, African Catholics, etc. Issues affecting women as women, men as men, youth, children, the sick, and the elderly are all discussed regularly. The very word Catholic means universal.

All of us together are formed by the Holy Spirit in the one Body of Christ. We have to get away from the thought that someone or some group is rather an exception than a norm in the Church. There is no one normal group in the Body of Christ. We are all united by the Holy Spirit to make up this Body. All partake of the heart of the Body's existence.

So also in our parish. There are hundreds of people who are part of the ministries of our parish. Some are talented teachers, some are musically talented, some visit the sick and homebound, some welcome inquirers, some work with our young people, some serve in a liturgical position. I could go on and on. None of these ministers are on the fringe of the parish. All make up the heart of the parish because we are all united by the Holy Spirit.

As Catholics we don't just put up with each other's differences, we value each other's differences as a unique manifestation of the Holy Spirit without which our faith body would be incomplete.

Now I have always been tempted to think that people who don't see things as I do are probably wrong. The big trouble with that is that everyone, thank God, is not like me. Everyone has not had the same experiences that I have had. Nor have I had their experiences. They don't know what it is like to have grown up in the Italian American culture. Nor do I know what it is like to be able to say, "My ancestors first came to this country in the 17th century." They don't know what it is like to have been on the edge for having pushed too hard, as I have foolishly done at times, nor do I know what it is like to have been on the edge for having to undergo a split at home, as many others have had in their lives. Even more fundamental. I don't know what it is like to view life as a woman, nor do women know what it is like to view things like a man.

Yet the Holy Spirit unites all different viewpoints to make the Body of Christ complete. Therefore, it would be as wrong for me to impose my individual perceptions on others, as it would be for others to demand that I see things through their eyes. The message that comes clear to us at Pentecost is that we must respect each other's differences. We have all been gifted with unique manifestations of the Spirit. The Church is stronger for our letting the Spirit live in our lives. Without the Holy Spirit we would be a disorganized mob. With the Holy Spirit we are the Body of Christ.

On Pentecost Sunday, the Church was born. The Holy Spirit united different people into the one Body of Christ. We, the members of the Body of Christ, benefit from our differences one from the other. May we allow the Holy Spirit to flow through our lives so that our respect for each other's uniqueness might itself draw more people to become members of His Body.

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino, SJ