

Homily for Pentecost Sunday



A violin made by the 17th century Antonio Stradivari

came on the market in London. It was valued at \$7 million dollars. Two points made it valuable: firstly it's a Stradivari and secondly in 200 years it had been hardly played. The Holy Spirit is our Stradivari. He has restyled us with His graces at Baptism and Confirmation. But we don't make use of them.

Everyone Mother Teresa told us is a pencil in God's hand. But He gets little writing from most of us.

We Westerners should blush at today's Pentecost. Two thousand years ago our ancestors worshipped trees. They attempted to stay warm without fire in damp caves. They hadn't yet invented the wheel. But this was not the case with the sophisticated people of India, the Middle East, and North Africa. They were lining up by the thousands waiting patiently to be baptized with the Holy Spirit by the Apostles & Co.

The Pentecost story comes out of Acts of the Apostles. Its nimble prose is almost a daily history of the early Church. The Acts are a historian's delight.

The word Pentecost is borrowed by us from the Jews. So too are other elements in our Liturgy. We owe much to the Jews and their genius. We even borrowed Jesus from them. If Christians are anti-Semites, they are guilty of short memories.

Originally Pentecost was a great Jewish feast. The Jews never took any gift from God for granted. They spent quality time thanking God for the first crops. The holy day was celebrated fifty days after Passover.

We celebrate Pentecost fifty days after the Resurrection of Christ. We salute not the appearance of tomatoes in our gardens but rather the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the founding members of Christianity. Today our Christian ancestors were confirmed in the Spirit. The terrible beauty that is the international Church was born. Is there any wonder we shoot off liturgical fireworks at Pentecost?

At the point we discuss, the Jesus followers were leaderless. They were scared. They were short on bodies but not brains. They numbered one hundred forty timid souls - the apostles, Mary, and unnamed individuals. This was hardly a group equipped to take over the world. They clung to each other like fly paper. They were in the large room which had been the scene of the Last Supper.

It was to these frightened souls the Holy Spirit came with His wagon load of gifts. They discovered that Christianity was not designed to be a do it yourself affair. (Daniel Durkin) In charismatic language, they were slain in the Spirit. They began to feel like super strong people. They found themselves ready to take on the cosmos. They heard each other speaking in foreign tongues. These languages would be their passports to evangelize the world.

What happened to them that first Pentecost? Take a glass of clear water. Drop in a few drops of red dye. Ah, red water. A new creation. A few drops of the Holy Spirit into our souls and they became a new creation. A little bit of the Holy Spirit will take us a long way.

The Holy Spirit was already the electricity causing the light to burn but remaining invisible. (Regis Armstrong)

The bedlam occurring in the Upper Room was heard. Someone dialed 911 and a mob assembled. It was an international crowd. They watched the freshly confirmed apostles rush from the Upper Room. They spoke in various tongues about Jesus. The Church was jumping into the fast lane. The world would never be the same.

Many say, "If the Holy Spirit gave us the same gifts, what a job we'd pull off for Christ! We'd turn our town upside down." The good news is that we received the same cornucopia of gifts at Baptism and Confirmation. These were our personal Pentecosts. The bad news is that we have never thrown the on switch to use these gifts. Most of them sleep. Think of the Holy Spirit as the generous uncle everyone wants. He loads us down with wonderful gifts at our Baptisms and then doubles the ante at Confirmation.

But the gifts become like the Stradivari violin in London. Though increasing in value, they are hardly used.

Today is a good day to blow the dust off our spirits and play sweet music. The Spirit will assist us. He is the master of surprises making the impossible possible. He reminds us it does not require great people to do great things - just unselfish ones. (Patricia Opatz) This Pentecost become God's well worn pencil. Leave your signature on the world.

Jesus does not need lawyers. He needs witnesses. (Paul VI)

Fr. James Gilhooley