

Pentecost
St. Paul's/Resurrección, Mount Vernon, WA

May 31, 2020
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Several months ago my wife asked me to grub out some mini-bamboo that was growing in the back yard. She didn't want them there, so it was up to me to eradicate them. I did the best I could, but something told me I was not done. Sure enough, just the other day I was digging in the same area and I found a few nascent bamboo leaves. Beneath them lay a root I had missed. It reminded me of the blackberries in our garden plot. They grow profusely on the other side of the fence and they are always trying to invade. I can pull them as often as I see them, and they still come up. I marvel at the power of life.

I don't want to compare the Holy Spirit to an unwanted plant, but they teach us about the theme of this day, Pentecost. As it is the nature of these plants to spring from a hidden root in the ground, it is the nature of the church to be inspired by divine energies from a source deep within, making us more than just a bunch of folks who share a tradition, but the very Body of Christ in the world today. By means of the Spirit, the Church is Jesus present here and now.

The readings unpack it for us.

In the first lesson from Acts, the disciples are all hiding again in a second-story room. They had been there before, and Jesus had appeared to them, but they are still running scared. Suddenly, there is a sound of a mighty wind. This is no gentle evening breeze. Think a wind that moves things. Think tornado. Think hurricane. The Church will never be the same again.

Then tongues of fire rest on each one of them. Fire gives life and destroys it. This image is a symbol of the power of the Spirit in our lives, to be more than just human machines, stumbling through life. There is a saying in Spanish, *"solo el que ha vivido tiene derecho a morir."* *"One can only truly die if one has first truly lived."* In making new life spring from within us, the Spirit deals death to life lived only half-way, life that is not life, but merely one routine after another. The Spirit makes us alive, enflamed with divine power and inspiration, taking that life into the world.

Then they begin to speak in other tongues. People from all over the Roman world had descended on Jerusalem for the Jewish festival of Pentecost, and they hear the 11 preaching about Jesus in their mother tongues. In 1917 an American missionary was selling Spanish bibles in Guatemala when a Kakchikel Indian man told him, "If your God is so great, why doesn't he speak my language?" Cut to the heart, William Cameron Townsend returned to the US and started what became the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Wycliffe Bible Translators, the sister organizations under which my parents went to Ecuador in 1956 to translate the Bible into Tsafiki of western Ecuador. But the missions sent their first translators into southern Mexico to translate for the 26 dialects of Mixteco, plus Triqui and Nahuatl.

There is no language foreign to God. There is no tongue God does not speak. God speaks to the heart of every person in their own words. See how great a Spirit is this, that in unexpected ways makes the Kingdom to break forth among us!

In the second lesson, St. Paul explains that in the Church people have different jobs, according to the gifts of the Spirit, their abilities and capacities, but all inspired by the same Spirit. I as priest, and Dennis as deacon, are not the Church. WE are the Church, each with something to share, each that is needed to make up the whole. Without everyone we are nothing. Certainly, the administration of the parish is given to people for whom that is their gift and calling, and Dennis and I serve under the authority of the Bishop, with the corresponding responsibilities, but consider how the Spirit fulfills the words of Jesus who said, “The one who would be greatest in the Kingdom of God must be the servant of all.” Who would have imagined that God would call forth a people whose hierarchy is upside down, where the most powerful and called to be the first to serve!

In the Gospel lesson Jesus stands up in the midst of the feast and proclaims that whoever would follow him would have rivers of living water flow from within. By this he referred to the Spirit, that was not yet sent upon the disciples because they had Jesus there in flesh and blood. This was fulfilled on the first Pentecost, but not complete, for the Spirit is still poured out on us in baptism.

It all begs a question. If Jesus came to make rivers of living water flow from within us, where is the living water?

I have seen it. I have seen it when people of good will and intention help others with no thought of reward. I have seen it when people show up to help build the Ofrenda for Día de los Muertos and the Posadas Navideñas, and to organize a Quinceañera for a young lady in the congregation. I have seen it in more than 1100 masks sewn and given to health workers for their protection. I have seen it in the way the COVID Relief Fund has been resourced. I have seen it as in this time of separation, the needs of the Church are met through the generosity of God’s people.

Where have you seen it? Where has the water flowed in your life? Where have you seen it in the lives of other people?

Where do you wish you saw it where it does not yet flow? Where do you yearn for the divine presence? Where are you thirsty for God? Where do you need God to show up?

And finally, where should you see it flow, but you have it stopped up: because you have wherewith to give and have not? Because you have something to say and have remained silent? Because you have something to do and you are not doing it?

Jesus promised that living water would flow from within you. Let the water flow, and you will be amazed at all the places where you see it flowing.