

Solemnity of Pentecost

May 28, 2023

Thank you all for your thoughts and prayers for me while I was away. And I'm immensely grateful to those who held the fort for me.

My friend and brother who passed away had a fitting burial by close to one hundred priests not counting religious brothers and sisters who joined us. My biggest joy is that following late Father Gabby's long suffering, he had the privilege of preparing himself to meet his Maker.

Let's see if this sounds familiar to you. You are out working in front of your house, doing some sort of chore. Maybe you're planting flowers or laying sod. Maybe you're doing some work on your car or trying to assemble a new bike or toy or piece of furniture that you ordered from Amazon. (And the directions, of course, are always as clear as day.) Maybe you're way up on a ladder, trying your best not to kill yourself, painting or cleaning the gutters or washing windows. Whatever it is, you know what happens next: One of your neighbors sees what you are doing and decides to come and watch. Ugh! For the vast majority of us, this is a nightmare come true.

And the reasons are two-fold. One - because none of us likes to be under a microscope when we are working on something. Right? Most of us simply want to work alone and in peace (and in quiet!). But the second reason is really what probably drives us the most crazy. What is that second reason? Why do we hate when someone wanders over to watch us work? Because we know that pretty soon he or she is going to be giving advice on how to do it, or is going to tell us what we're doing wrong, or is going to try to help us with their "expertise". And who wants that? Seriously.

Who wants THAT?

Today, we gather to celebrate Pentecost, a day on which we come together to remember that day long ago when a Jewish festival became something life-changing for those who had chosen to believe in the resurrection, had chosen to put their trust in Jesus, had chosen to follow wherever he wanted to lead them. It's really not possible to overestimate the power of this experience in the life of the Church.

Whatever exactly happened that day, however we understand the descriptions used by the authors of the Gospels and Acts, one thing is pretty clear: The community of faith was forever changed by this experience. They were changed from being paralyzed by fear to being on fire with the Good News, on fire with the mission of Jesus, on fire to tell the whole world what they

witnessed and how they had been transformed in ways they could never have imagined. Who wants THAT? Seriously.

That might strike you as an odd question. And yet, I believe it's one we must sincerely ask ourselves. You see, we're not here this day to only remember the past. We're also here to give thanks to God for the gift of himself in the person of the Holy Spirit - a gift given long ago and a gift given to each of us, in this time and place. And so, what happened TO and FOR them is what God hopes for each of us. He wants to put his very life into us, he wants to pour the grace of his Spirit into our hearts and minds - setting us on fire, the kind of fire that can change the world.

Who wants THAT?

And that's the crux of the matter. It's one thing to believe that God CAN and WANTS to dwell within each of us. But it's another thing to actually WANT God to do that, it's another thing to WANT God to shape all that we say and do - shape our whole being. It's sort of like that nosy neighbor wandering across the street to "show us exactly how it should be done". Even if they have something worthwhile to say, even if they know more than we do, even if they have the best sort of advice, we resist, convinced that our way is the best way, or being unwilling to admit that maybe we don't have all the answers.

You might disagree. "Of course I want God to help me in every way possible. Who wouldn't?" you might ask convincingly. Well, I'm here to tell you "me" - that's who. And I'm guessing some of you too. What most of us mean when we say we want God's help is that we want God to take away our problems, or fix them for us, or keep us from experiencing them in the first place. What we really want is for God to make sure that our lives go as planned - as WE have planned. And that's not what God is selling, nor is it what he is promising.

But what he IS promising is to be with us when we are going through tough times (and good times too). He's promising to lighten our load, promising to help us carry our crosses, promising to help us find grace and hope and meaning in every life experience, the joys and the sorrows. And it's all through his Spirit, the same Spirit who came alive in those first believers some two thousand years ago, and the exact same Spirit who wants to come alive in each of us. And sometimes we just aren't ready to embrace the life God wants for each of us. We want him to fix things, and he wants to help us love every person and in every situation. We want him to punish those who have hurt us, and he wants us to forgive. We want him to help us get the best job and live in the best house, and he wants us to give generously from our want and not from our excess. I hope you get the idea.

Who wants THAT?

There's that question again. And so, today, as we gather to celebrate this great feast, giving thanks to God for the gift of his Spirit, let's be sure to strive to truly believe that God can and will dwell within each of us. But let's take it one step further. Let's not simply believe that it is possible, but rather want it to be so, want it to happen. I guess you could say God is coming across the street to help. Will we let him? Do we believe he knows more than us? Will we welcome what he is offering?

Or do we wish he would just mind his own business? I think you know the best choice, the only one that is worth making. Come Holy Spirit! Come!

Father Boat