

Today our Pentecost procession went quite well. I see lots of people celebrating the day by wearing red, and don't worry, I'll be sure that all that confetti gets cleaned up. But the first time I was in charge of Pentecost Sunday's festivities it didn't go so well.

I was the seminary intern for Fr. Chris Webber and we planned a fun thing for the kids at the Canaan church for the morning. There is a little balcony there at Christ Church that isn't used any more. In fact they even took down the staircase that leads up to it so that no one would go up there. I had a great idea that the kids could go up for just that one morning and as people came into the church they could throw red confetti on the parishioners as they entered the church.

Children always love a chance to play in church, make a mess, and surprise their parents. Let me say right now that no, the balcony didn't give way. No one fell and no one got hurt. So the children threw the confetti. Everyone was surprised and pleased. There was much laughter and it was all a big success. Then a father moved the ladder into place to have the children come down from the balcony. That's where we encountered a problem I had not anticipated. They were frightened with the prospect of climbing down the ladder. Going up had been easy. But having to climb over the balcony rail and onto the ladder, looking down at the floor which seemed so far away....suddenly, none of the children would come down. The service paused while the father tried to reason with the children.

The silence started to grow uncomfortably long. We couldn't continue until the problem was solved. Several fathers then got into the act. They convinced a couple of the braver children to come down, the rest eventually followed suit and the service continued. Whew! Disaster averted! But I learned a big lesson that morning in orchestrating liturgy. Know how you are going to get into something, and know how you are going to get out of it, and make sure that everyone is ok with it. Fortunately, we have no balconies here so you don't have to worry

about me experimenting with our children to see what they can climb down from. ...at least this year. hmmm ...that gets me thinking ...

This is a lot of fun, little activities with red and white. This Sunday is also called Whitsunday particularly back in England. White for the white of the Holy Spirit doves, one of which we have in our HS window in the back, and for the white clothing that in olden days, was worn by those about to be baptized.

But, amid the fun and games of Pentecost now, we remember the amazing and serious story of the disciples of Pentecost then....still hanging out together, gathering in a room by themselves. The winds of change were in the air. Remember Peter, that bumbling fool (at best)? He said “Lord, then wash my whole body” - He got a little overly enthusiastic the night of the last supper. And remember Peter, that denying coward (at worst)? He said, “I don’t know him” of Jesus only a few hours later when he denied his Lord in the courtyard outside where Jesus was being held.

Well, something happened to Peter that miraculous day of Pentecost. Something changed with all the disciples. What we have in the Story of Pentecost written by Luke is the dramatic depiction of the coming of a great wind blowing through the entire house, and tongues of fire that rested on each of the disciples. Kind of like the tongues of fire that each of our choir and readers had resting on them? It’s an imperfect depiction of a perfectly divine moment.

Thank you all for your willingness to take part in something that just reminds us through a simple symbol that the Holy Spirit has blown the winds of change right through this parish church too. Can’t you feel it?

I don’t know, though. This all sounds pretty fantastic and unbelievable. How can we be sure that this all happened just the way Luke said it did? Well, we can’t be sure. We don’t know how much of Luke’s story is factual and how much is fanciful.

We don't know exactly how a man like Peter went from being a bumbling, sometimes loyal follower of Jesus, to a masterful preacher that we hear addressing all who live in Jerusalem. Peter preached in the words of the prophet Joel who reminded the people that God all along had said he would give his spirit – POUR OUT HIS SPIRIT on everyone. Peter says using Joel's words that **everyone** will become a prophet if they so desire. The purpose of the Spirit coming to the people is to allow them to prophesy. In this case to prophesy doesn't mean fortune telling or predicting the future. It means telling the truth, maybe in a new way through imagination and fortitude.

Now in the Gospel reading today, John has a slightly different take on the coming of the Spirit. Our reading comes from Chapter 14 of the Gospel where Jesus tells his disciples that they will be given the Spirit whom he calls the Advocate. Jesus says that the Spirit will teach us everything, and remind us of all that he has said. It is a Spirit of peace and serenity, of knowledge and understanding. It is Wisdom in the Gospel of John.

It is later, at the end of the John's Gospel, when Jesus appears in the upper room after his resurrection, he breathes on the disciples and gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit. The giving of the Spirit to the disciples is a story told differently by Luke and by John. But there are common elements; wind or breath - peace and empowerment – wisdom and truth. So, of what use is this Spirit? Can anything practical be done with the Spirit or are we going to be satisfied with throwing confetti around once a year and then putting the little flames back in the box for another year?

Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to empower us to proclaim the truth of the Gospel. Think again of our example of Peter, given the words and the courage to share the story with all the people of Jerusalem and later beyond Jerusalem. The crowd is not so sure about this new Peter. The crowd suspects that Peter and his friends are drunk even though it is nine o'clock in the morning. They were doubtful and sneering. How often have we heard about crowds that

think the worst, say the worst and mob mentality takes over. This crowd was only the latest in a long line of unruly crowds that mocked and taunted Jesus and his disciples. I'm sure you can think of more than one angry crowd from our Gospels.

The same happens today, although we have crowds that form over the Internet in chat rooms, facebook , twitter and blogs. We have crowds that form in newspaper and TV reporting and editorializing. Take the current awful disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Thinking about it logically, all of the parties involved want this thing to be solved as soon as possible. There is no one who thinks that it might be better to just sit back and see if the great pipe spewing oil will quit. Everyone from BP to the Coast Guard are very motivated and anxious to see this thing resolved, shut down, and cleaned up. And the people working on it are scientists and engineers from all brainstorming a solution to this.

But we hear the crowd shouting, "They aren't doing enough." "Boycott the BP gas stations", "The government is being lackadaisical." The crowd's tendency towards name calling and throwing blame around is not indicative of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Sure, there is a place for criticism – but constructive criticism.

Bill Nye the Science Guy compiled some home videos of iReporters who are trying to find positive solutions, albeit not quite workable solutions. And I've heard that some people who work in hair salons are gathering hair cuttings in big boxes and sending it down to the gulf coast to make into booms. I guess hair is particularly good at attracting and holding on to oil. Might seem silly. Might seem miniscule in the face of hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil. But it is a positive step. Someone thought of something that could be done to help, no matter what scale that help is on.

Let us pray for the gift of the Spirit, in this matter and in all the problems that affect our lives.

And through our celebration today, and through the light-hearted symbols of our faith, let's remember that we are the prophets now, given the responsibility of speaking the Truth and telling the story. Jesus has given each of us through the Spirit, the gift of peace, and the gift of proclamation, and even the gift of brainstorming together for new ideas and new solutions to the problems we face.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning saw the Holy Spirit at work:

"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries."