

Today is the feast of the Pentecost. The traditional day of remembering God's gift to us of the Holy Spirit. This is a day in the past where our church has featured red balloons, red confetti, and even one year a small flock of white doves released outside to fly back to their home in Litchfield. It's usually a day of celebration. We heard our traditional reading of the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles in which the Spirit is described as both a wild wind blowing through the place, and like tongues of fire resting on the heads of the apostles.

The Spirit brings us inspiration and enlightenment. The Spirit is the person of the Holy Trinity responsible for all those Ah Ha (!) moments that we have. The Spirit is the One who guides us through our days and helps keep God's commandments and God's desires for us in our minds ...if we'll allow it. And we are truly in spiritual need of letting God lead us and guide us today.

Passing the terrible milestone of more than 100,000 people dying in the COVID-19 pandemic, just in this country alone, is shocking. Today doesn't feel as much like a celebration as it does a day of sobering reminders. We also have over 40 million people out of work in the United States. And we have the specter of yet another senseless death of a black man at the hands of white policemen. The looting and burning and destruction that have happened in the wake of that heartbreak piles tragedy upon tragedy. If there ever was a time to turn to God's Spirit now is the time. We humans seem to have difficulty understanding how to love and respect each other if we use our own intellect and will without the Holy Spirit's guidance.

If you have ever been canoeing, you'll understand what I mean when I say that you can't paddle a canoe from the bow (at least not successfully.) Even if you don't canoe, but you have a little knowledge of physics, it makes sense that if you want to get a long piece of wood, fiberglass or metal moving through the water in a particular direction, you have to have the force and propulsion in the stern.

I remember being in one of the canoe races that used to be held on the Housatonic at about this time every year. They were run by Bill Tingley and were held to support local non-profit organizations. But I remember thinking when on the water paddling like crazy, that this was one heck of a way to ruin a beautiful spring paddle down the river. The power company always kindly let out a large flow of water on the day of the canoe race. That way we could be assured of heading downstream quickly, and we would have fewer rocks to avoid.

The canoe on the river is a metaphor for me of life. One is swept down the river by a current that we can't really completely fathom and don't have control over. That's life. The river goes where it will excavating land here and depositing land there. When we are in the swift current of life we sometimes just have to go with the flow. If one tries to turn sideways in a swift river the canoe will surely capsize. If one tries to paddle upstream we'll just tire ourselves out and end up downstream anyway.

We are like the rower in the bow of the boat. We can change the direction we're going a bit, but we'd be much better off if we leave the majority of the paddling, of the navigation and the calling of instructions to the stern paddler. I submit that the stern paddler is the Holy Spirit. That Spirit is trustworthy and if we listen to the commands and make adjustments to our paddling, based on those instructions, we'll be more certain to be able to ride out rapids and get to calmer pools of water. The Holy Spirit can pick the path down the river that will not put us on the rocks, but will guide us if we can have faith in that River Guide of ours.

The sweep of time and the ravages of disease, disaster and violence are like the river at high flow. And like the runaway current of disease that we've had sweep through our nation and the world over the last few months, we as a nation feel at sea, needing to make course corrections but unsure as to what will save both our people from death and get our economy back on track.

The Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry has asked us to take time to grieve today for those who have died. Bishop Curry said in a press release. "Let this tragic moment not pass without us honoring the many among us who have lost their lives or lost their loved ones." *ENS May 28, 2020*

This week an unprecedented group of over one hundred national faith leaders — from Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions, together with the National Council of Mayors, have agreed that now is the time to recognize the souls we've lost, and mourn their death. May we all that the guidance of the Holy Spirit to honor and recognize the sacredness of every human being, every life lost no matter where they live, or who they are. May we see each human being as blessed, and a blessing to others no matter how difficult it is for us to hold 100,000 separate personalities and their families' love in our hearts.

This grim milestone coincides with a time that is sacred to all three Abrahamic faiths. Muslims have just finished celebrating Eid al-Fitr, the end of Ramadan; Jews are celebrating the feast of Shavuot; and Christians are observing Pentecost.

You and I need to open our hearts today to pray: to mourn the dead, to imagine and to be inspired in hope, and to keep the faith; all by the power of the Holy Spirit.