

Pentecost Sunday
June 4, 2017

One of the little details that we may not notice about the Scripture accounts of Pentecost is that the Holy Spirit descended on community groups, not individuals. Even in Paul's road-to-Damascus encounter with Jesus, it wasn't until he met with Ananias that the scales fell from his eyes and he was baptized.

In St. Luke's story of Pentecost, he started with the detail that everybody had come together. When St. John depicted Jesus breathing his Spirit onto the disciples it is again in a communal setting.

Mary Magdalene was not given the Spirit when she met the risen Christ in the garden, and even when the beloved disciple "believed" at the empty tomb, John did not say that the Spirit came to him. Jesus conferred his Spirit on a community gathered in prayer waiting. And they weren't even sure what they were waiting and praying for.

Luke and John give us two very different renditions of the gift of the Spirit to the community of faith.

In Luke, it happened after fifty days: a kind of forty-day seminar where Jesus appeared to his disciples until the day of his ascension. Then after a ten-day waiting period, the Holy Spirit rushed in like wind and fire onto the gathered community with the result that they couldn't help but share their Gospel.

But John paints a very different picture. In his description, on the very day of the resurrection Jesus suddenly appeared in the middle of the disciples who out of fear had gone into hiding. And then Jesus offered them peace. A peace that came in the form of forgiveness. Remember, this is the first time the disciples saw their risen Lord after they had had abandoned and betrayed him.

And really those locked doors are just one more sign of their lack of faith. Still, Christ broke through it all with the offer of peace. This is a profoundly humbling moment, very much like Jesus washing their feet.

So, as he greeted them with peace they knew all too well that they don't deserve his forgiveness. They know how much they've let him down, and he's proclaiming his love for them just as they are.

He then showed them his hands and his side, signs of past events that nothing could change. But because Jesus had broken the bonds of death, he offered them freedom from being determined by their past.

In *Breathing Under Water* Richard Rohr says that forgiveness implies letting go "of our hope for a better or different past." Both the forgiver and the forgiven acknowledge the reality of what has happened between them, *but they will not let themselves be bound by it.*

They know the hurt and the wrong but they refuse to replay it over and over again and again. Forgiveness should never be a judicial process or a market exchange where there can be a correctly calculated payback that evens the score.

Forgiveness is an encounter of love. All of salvation history, culminating in the Paschal mystery shows us that forgiveness is born from the belief the past can be redeemed and its effects can be redirected from a passive acceptance of injustice or the vengeful interpretation of "an eye for an eye."

This is the Gospel the Spirit impelled the disciples to preach. They were able to preach forgiveness only because they had experienced it. If it was humbling to be forgiven by the risen Christ, but it was also empowering.

Our Holy Father Pope Francis explained this in *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of The Gospel") by saying "No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by [Christ's] boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew"

So when we greet each other with peace today, we are challenged to remember the meaning Jesus gave that word. The peace of Christ be with you" is the greeting of sinner to sinner, Christian to Christian as forgiven forgivers. It is a blessing that calls us equally to humility and generosity.

And what we celebrate today, is that it is a blessing that we can only make real if our parish community is enlivened by the breath of the Holy Spirit.