

As We Celebrate Pentecost

The feast of Pentecost marks a major turning point in the history of salvation. It is an event in which Christ's disciples, fortified by the Holy Spirit, continue the work of their Lord in time and space. It is an event that affirms that the crucified, risen and ascended God-Man is present and working through his living body i.e. the Church. "For I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mathew 28:20)

Personally, and as the Church, we are called to reveal to the world that, by the descent of the Holy Spirit, Christ lives within us for the life of the world and its salvation. Consequently, as bearers of the Spirit we are placed in a very difficult and vulnerable position. This is so because as bearers of the Spirit we, like our Savior, are expected to take on the agonies and sins of the world.

Before this can occur we need to examine if the "safe space" formed in part by family, religion and nationality has caused us to ignore or become indifferent to those who exist outside of our protected enclave. If our festal celebration is to be more than form, then we need to ask ourselves if occupying our "safe space" has rendered us blind to the other whose race, religion, color, sexual orientation, education and social standing is different from ours. We need to ask ourselves if personally, and as Church, we have allowed fear, ignorance and resentment to erect psychological and spiritual barriers that justify, promote and protect the status quo of social inequality and injustice for those we deem unworthy or unacceptable to intrude upon our "safe space." Unless we can remove ourselves from our "safe space" the gift of Pentecost becomes shrouded in cynicism and ultimately squandered.

By virtue of our baptism and chrismation, each of us, through the Church, has put on Christ. Each of us has been sealed with *the gift* of the Holy Spirit. Having received these gifts of regeneration – having been born anew – each of us is commissioned to reflect the beautiful face of Christ. By celebrating the feast of Pentecost, by being possessed by the Spirit, we are able to leave behind our "safe space." By celebrating the feast of Pentecost, we have the opportunity to hear the soft voice of the Spirit beckoning us to follow Christ into the world.

From a missionary perspective this entails expanding the parameters of the Church by using existing cultures to proclaim, nurture and sustain the dignity, equality and value of every human being. But maintaining this course requires the Church and its members to first decry the economic and social disparities that prevail in our society. These disparities are derived from the "original sin" of self-love and a lust for power that is often exemplified by unbridled luxury and hedonism. The outcome of this "original sin" is not self-contained but permeates every fiber of our society to the extent that one human being is valued over another.

Following through on the Gospel's missionary mandate requires the Church and its members to stand against any state, any social system that vaingloriously claims to

promote human dignity and self worth for *all* while ignoring and/or promoting economic disparities that in the end benefit the wealthy minority. This especially holds true for nations and social systems that shamelessly manipulate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to promote a social agenda of economic inequality that in turn fosters social injustice. Paraphrasing the words of Father Sergius Bulgakov, the spiritual state of a nation can neither be indifferent to nor separated from its economic life. (Cf. *The Ideal Economics*, 1903)

Because we are collectively transformed by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ we are called to gather around the one table of the one high priest sharing the one bread and one cup of salvation. And though we are unable to break the one bread and share the one cup, we are to be ever mindful of the particular gifts and ministries given to us by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the body of Christ. For it is in the sharing and the offering up of these gifts that the Church, beginning here and now, proclaims and manifests the new creation.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the tabernacle of God dwelling among all humanity. He will dwell among them; and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be sorrow nor crying nor pain, for the first things have passed away.' And the one who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new. (Revelation 21: 3-5)

Father Robert M. Arida