

Pentecost Sunday, 2017
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
June 3, 4, 2017

Just recently I have seen news headlines about 'the big one'. If you lived in Scotland you might think the article would be about 'Nessie', the Loch Ness monster. Here in the US, however, 'the big one' refers to the earthquake that will hit the West Coast and California in particular. The news seems to be no longer 'IF', but 'WHEN'.

Today I would like for us to think of 'the big one' as neither the Loch Ness Monster nor the earthquake in California, but as the Feast of Pentecost. I think it is appropriate because as we heard in today's Scriptures, it was at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit breathed life, power and energy into the early community. It was the Holy Spirit that drove them out of the upper room and inspired them to begin to preach. As you remember, prior to their experience of the Holy Spirit, they would lock themselves up in that upper room out of fear of the Jews. But later, when the Romans would arrest and persecute them, they did not seem to have the same fear. They continued to preach openly. WHY? WHAT WAS DIFFERENT? They did this because of the energy, life and power they were receiving from the Holy Spirit. Pentecost was not a 'one day event'. It goes on and on. Last weekend we heard Jesus say to his disciples: *"Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."* This presence of Jesus is accomplished through the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul writes to the Corinthians in today's second Scripture, *"No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit."* Nothing about our faith life makes much sense in terms of the world. If you stand each weekend to profess faith in the Creed, and at the end of it think, "yes, that is what I believe and live by", you do this not because your own intelligence has led you to accept these truths. You believe and live by these truths in and through the Holy Spirit. *No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."*

As we celebrated the Feast of the Ascension last weekend, we noted that an important part of the Ascension Mystery is the commissioning of the disciples. They were told to *"go out and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."* It is precisely after this commissioning that Jesus says, *"Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."* You go, I am with you 'in and through the Holy Spirit.'

Sometimes Pentecost is referred to as the Birthday of the Church. Maybe you think of it that way. We say this because it was the coming of the Holy Spirit that breathed life into the disciples and other early followers of Jesus. It was the Holy Spirit that moved them out of the upper room and into the streets to preach. Imagine if they had not gone! The Church may not have been realized!

Important to understand here is that Jesus came to launch a movement think of things like Black Lives Matter, Pro-Life Movement, Women Against War Movement, etc. As that movement was born out of the Holy Spirit, the early Christian community became known by an interesting name; they were known as The Way. There are references to this title in several early Christian writings. When you think about it, it makes good sense; Jesus said of himself, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Jesus did not come to launch a building. In fact, it seems that wherever focus is on a building, there is little or no focus on movement. And, without movement, there is no real Church. Maybe a good question is 'when is there a need for a building?' Or even, is there ever a need for a building?' Buildings and movements can often even be at odds with each other. Buildings are stable, stationary; movements are fluid, active, going somewhere. Think just of when a family finally gets a house ... they feel tied down, and they often express they have less time for many other things, even things with family. They have a house! Or think of the person in the parable who could not follow Jesus because he had just bought a farm.

Someone once offered me this interesting insight. In any church congregation (I suppose really in any organization like a fraternal group or a womens' group,) there are those who are 'consumers', others that can be called 'contributors, and then those we can call 'the committed'. You probably have had experience of this as well as I. When the group is a real 'movement', consumers are encouraged to move beyond to become 'contributors', and the 'contributors ' are encouraged to join 'the committed'. If no 'consumers' are willing to move, the consumer group will continue to be the same year after year, even decade after decade. When consumers and even contributors fail to move beyond, then the top groups empty through age, and the movement dies. More positively, when the consumer group does move beyond, then there is room for those not yet part of the movement to become a part of it. When consumers move beyond, there is room for new blood. What kills any group, or movement, is when there is obviously no movement.

Pentecost is a celebration of a movement inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Once known as 'the Way', this movement today is the Church. It is not a set of buildings but a community of people who believe in Jesus, love Jesus, and are committed to the message and mission of Jesus. They are willing to die to themselves and their own desires so that the Way of Jesus may grow. Think about yourself ... think about our parish A parish has all groups of people: consumers, contributors and the committed. But in which group are you? How long have you been in that group? Do you detect any movement in the parish, or are consumers just eternally consumers, and contributors and committed sort of 'wearing out'. Pentecost is a great Feast to be open to the Holy Spirit. Become empowered by the life of the Holy Spirit. Let others know and see that you are part of a heavenly movement. It is your salvation! And, it is meant for others also – all others!

