

HOMILY - Pentecost [A] **[Agents of the Holy Spirit]**

Donna Dugay, remembers a day when she was 11 years old, and her parents took their six children for a special day at the beach. Donna's mother brought a picnic lunch – fried chicken and her famous potato salad – and prepared a plate for them. "When I looked up from my plate, my mother was fixing one more plate... She turned away from us and walked over maybe 20 or 30 feet to where there was a man by himself. And he was picking his way through the trashcan. And my mother offered him the plate. The look on his face was one of surprise and much gratitude." Her mom came back and sat down with the family. Years later, Donna asked her mom if she remembered the incident. Her mom laughed and said she had forgotten all about it. But Donna never forgot what her mom had done.

How do these things – these sometimes rare deeds of kindness happen? It's not because we all have a kindness tax we have to pay. The fact that they are rare in a world of materialism and division only makes them seem beyond our everyday touch – something we only see on social media as a human "feel-good" story.

Today we are celebrating the solemnity of Pentecost. Some may think this involves things like tongues of fire and foreign languages. Yet, to focus on that is to miss the truth of this occasion. The feast of Pentecost is as important to Christianity as is the Incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ. Without Pentecost, and God's Holy Spirit in our world, we would be living in a far worse world than what we have today.

Yet we always seem to have some trouble experiencing, if not picturing, the Holy Spirit. Is it a he or a she (hint: neither – it's a spirit). For many of us, the Spirit is some theoretical figure, and many, when we pray, pray to Jesus or the Father before we think of the Holy Spirit – as if he is some sort of afterthought.

The Father and Son give us their very Spirit to be our guide and helper throughout our lives. The Creator starts each one of us on our journey, the Savior gives us our goal of eternal life, but it is the Holy Spirit who does the grunt work, by working with us each day to get home. That brings us to the question – how does the Spirit help us?

God's Spirit needs two items to help us on our life journey. The first item is *us*. The Holy Spirit doesn't do magic. The Holy Spirit was given to us as our guide and helper. There is only one possible drawback. That happens when the person needing help in life is cold, bitter, indifferent to others or hardened. This is the person who lives in fear because they have been told to expect the worst from strangers, foreigners and those who are different.

This results in a view of life that convinces the person that getting through life is strictly up to them and that everyone else is out only for themselves. The hard emotional exterior of this person makes it impossible for the Spirit of God to help - it is as if they had drawn a blackout curtain over themselves - a heavy drape that shuts out all light.

What the Spirit of God needs to help us is an opening. There is a Greek word for this - it is *kenosis*. Kenosis means to empty oneself or to let go of our barriers and fears. The model for kenosis is Jesus, which makes perfect sense, since kenosis is also the way to inviting his Spirit to work in our lives. It is the admission that we are all wounded. It is way of saying to God - I need your help, and I know that only you can help me.

When we humbly open ourselves to God, we also open a space for God's Spirit to come and work within our lives. Throw back the blackout curtain and light comes streaming in - the light of peace and gentleness. And when the Spirit is at work in us, if we are paying attention, we will usually get some sort of sign to that effect.

Many years ago my mom was in hospice at my sister's house out in the country. There were many large windows there and she could look out at the fields and woods nearby and watch the wildlife. She especially loved it whenever the male cardinals would feed at the bird feeder outside the window. However, her condition continued to worsen and she got weaker and more tired. One day in April, she passed away. A few days later, after the funeral, my sister was grieving as she sat in a chair near the window, when she heard a noise. When she looked out, she saw many red cardinals, all perched on branches of the tree outside her window. In her emptying grief, she had been given a gift to help her heal on the journey.

The second item the Holy Spirit needs to help and guide us is – other people. God’s Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, needs us, as *agents of the Spirit*, to make connections with other people in this world. These connections are called relationships. When we can let go of our pride and see another person as just like us, we can become an agent for the Holy Spirit. Every human being, no matter how lost or weak or different, has something to offer to others. We are all vulnerable underneath our masks and we all need to be loved and appreciated.

This is where the Spirit can work. When we see someone hurting, or in need of help, and we feel like we should step forward and help, that is the Spirit working within us. We have the choice – walk away in the hope that someone else will do it, or step forward and try to help in a kind way.

Our world today sends us messages. Messages about ourselves and about other people. Many of these messages are harmful to the work of the Holy Spirit – as St. Paul might have said, they grieve the Holy Spirit. These are the messages that tell us to be afraid of foreigners and immigrants, or that we need to spend money and buy things to feel good, or that other people are objects for us to use as we want.

A person open to the Holy Spirit rejects these messages as the lies that they are. Of course we are not alike, and of course we will disagree with each other. But the promptings of the Spirit urge us to remember that we are all creatures of God, all trying to walk the path of life and all in need of help.

In his book, *Becoming Human*, Jean Vanier wrote: “To treat each human as a person means that we are concerned for them, that we listen to them, and that we want them to become more whole, free and kind.”

When we make space for God’s Spirit within us, and use that grace to reach out in kindness to others, we are agents of the Spirit of God, planting little seeds of goodness. Our world is in dire need of such seeds.

All it takes is an honest and humble prayer –

Come Holy Spirit, soften my stubborn heart, and make me an instrument of your love!