

May 11, 2008 – Pentecost Sunday

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First reading: Acts 2:1-11	At Pentecost the disciples were in a place together when the spirit entered leaving them with the gift of tongues..
Responsorial psalm: Psalms 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34	God sends for the breath (or spirit) that renews the face of the earth.
Second reading: First Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13	“As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ.”
Gospel: John 20:19-23	The apostles are fearful and hiding until Jesus comes to the saying “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” and leaves with them the Spirit to carry out his mission.

The feast of Pentecost dates back to the first century and originated from the Jewish feast of weeks, occurring 50 days after Passover. For the Jewish people, Pentecost was a feast of celebration in thanksgiving for the harvest. Processions led to the temple in Jerusalem where the first fruits of the harvest were offered.

In today's Gospel, we see how the disciples, in fear of those coming to the temple in Jerusalem for the feast, hid themselves in a locked room. Instead of celebrating and giving thanks, their faith was frozen into silent submission and inaction.

We, too, many times, become locked in fear and inaction. All seems so overwhelming. Yet we are surrounded by Pentecost stories.

Paulo's story is one. In the 1970s, Paulo migrated from the northeast of Brazil in search of work. Like many others, he was fleeing drought, unproductive soil, and unemployment. He found work as a bricklayer in the mega-city of Sao Paulo and settled in a slum area on the periphery of the city.

In a recent 20-year span, 28 million people left the rural areas of Brazil and moved to large cities, a majority to São Paulo. The rings of misery are evident in neighborhoods that lack adequate housing, jobs, transportation, basic health and educational services. Coupled with the negative impacts of globalization and a growing culture of individualism, the socially excluded fend for themselves and are most likely to be victims of violent crime, as well.

With great sacrifice and hard work, Paulo raised five children. He participated in the local Catholic church's base Christian community and with many others struggled to get a health post, a local school, and day care center in the region. He and his church members took seriously that “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world is a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel” (*Justice in the World*, Synod of Bishops, 1971). They actively worked for respect for human rights and denounced injustices.

In urban areas, fighting over scarce resources accompanied the huge growth in population over such a short time. Violence and unemployment dramatically increased. Mario, Paulo's youngest son, spent years looking for a job. One day, he arrived home, badly beaten by the local police, having been caught in a conflict between the police and a group of youth accused of dealing drugs.

After years of growing despair at the violence in the neighborhood as well as police involvement in drug trafficking, Paulo had reached his limit. He raged with anger at the sight of his son and, at the same time, became consumed by wanting the “justice of vengeance” on the police officer who had beaten Mario. In Paulo's words, “I couldn't seem to control the anger and desire for vengeance in my heart, not just against the police officer but all those who had destroyed the peace in our neighborhood. I wanted punishment and retaliation. Over and over again, I saw how our community had become filled with fear, not just of the violence but fear of speaking out against it.”

This fear and anger were destroying the fabric of his family as well as the society around them. Paulo felt guilty that he couldn't seem to live out the gospel values of forgiveness and reconciliation that seemed so disconnected from the pain and horror of daily life. Like the disciples locked in the upper room, Paulo felt locked in himself and a fearful, silent community where the world was divided into “us” and “them.”

Paulo became ill and lost his job. He volunteered at the local day center, of which his wife was the director. He remembers the day clearly when Cassio came to volunteer at the day care. Paulo

recognized him from the neighborhood. He got to know Cassio as a man, a father like himself who worried about his family and the violence and who also wanted to do something to make the world a better place. Only later did he learn that Cassio was the father of the police officer who had beaten his son some years before. Through his relationship with Cassio, Paulo was able to see a bigger picture – not just a world of “us, the victims” and “them, the aggressors” but rather one, in which, in many ways, we are all victims and offenders. Paulo was able to see the world with different eyes and saw how, in nurturing his feelings of anger, fear, and desire for revenge; he had lost some of his courage and energy to work for justice.

Paulo was at Cassio’s side when Cassio received the news that his son, the police officer, had been assassinated. In the faith community at the funeral, Paulo experienced the spirit at work like the violent, rushing powerful wind of Pentecost. It was there that he made a conscious choice to forgive: not to excuse the violence, but to develop another narrative to live by – a narrative of solidarity that recognizes that we are all truly brothers and sisters in Christ. A narrative that helps him to face the suffering and violence be outraged by it, work to change it and, at the same time, to keep a compassionate heart. Paulo today actively works in his community and is a witness to these gospel values.

Today’s Pentecost Scripture readings challenge us to shed our old ways of acting. They give us another narrative to live by. The disciples, fearful and silent, were filled with the Spirit and went forth to spread the Good News. Through the Spirit, they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Paulo and Cassio, like the disciples at Pentecost, were “amazed at how each one understood the other.” Could these other tongues that are so needed today be those of compassion and solidarity?

The power of the spirit enables us to work through our fears and to go forth in courage to heal the woundedness of the created world. This spiritual force is the root of the Good News. From this comes the peace that Jesus proclaims in today’s Gospel, “Peace be with you. Receive the Holy Spirit. As God has sent me, I send you.” What is our mission? Are we and our communities paralyzed by fear, dividing the world into “us” and “them?” What is the meaning of the Pentecost harvest for us? In the Vatican II document, *The Church in the Modern World*, we read that “Now is the acceptable time for a change of heart. Let us set our gaze on the world and put aside animosity and hatred.” Are we willing to accept this challenge and open up to the Spirit?

May we truly believe that the Spirit is mysteriously alive, that we are one body and that the same God is working in all of us. May the harvest of this Pentecost transform us that we may build peace that is “founded on truth, built according to justice, vivified and integrated by charity” (*Pacem in Terris*, 1963). Loving God, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

For more information:

Nonviolent conflict resolution is something that a new president and congress can begin to invest in as a means toward world peace. Read more in *Loving Our Neighbor in a Shrinking World*, a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who witness the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions. Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates’ policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the source of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change.

*[Email](mailto:ogc@maryknoll.org) for a copy, or find the election guide here:
www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm*

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