

Feast of Pentecost – June 9, 2019

Each school year our incoming eighth grade design a Friday shirt. For the upcoming school year they have designed one with the following quote from Pope Francis: "Make a ruckus"; words he spoke to over three million young people gathered for World Youth Day on the Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 2015. He was basically encouraging them to stir up the Church and the world with the presence of Christ, the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit, and not to just accept the status quo (how things are) believing nothing is really going to change. "Make a ruckus that brings a free heart, a ruckus that brings solidarity, a ruckus that brings us hope, a ruckus that comes from knowing Jesus."

Today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost; it's fifty days since we celebrated the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; for the last fifty days we have been praising and thanking God for our baptismal faith, our baptismal vocation; through the waters of baptism we became one with Christ, we received our eternal title, sons and daughters of God, we became part of an amazing body of believers we call the Church. Today, we celebrate the official birthday of this Church and we ask the Holy Spirit to fall afresh upon us.

Once the Apostles no longer experienced the physical presence of the Risen Christ, they returned in fear to the Upper Room. It was as if they had lost their security blanket, Jesus, and now they were on their own to continue the mission entrusted to them as Jesus had returned to the Father. But it is in that Upper Room where another promise is fulfilled, the promise of the Spirit of the living God, a gift that would cause a ruckus in their lives, and in the lives of all who would encounter them from this time on. The Spirit of the living God stirs their hearts and transforms their lives, fear is dispelled, courage is given, and they leave the security of that Upper Room, which had held them together in faith, to face the world. The same Upper Room where they had received the command to 'do this in memory of him', to celebrate the meal which will always bind them together, and forever be the wellspring of inspiration, challenge, courage and resolve to live and share the Gospel, the truth of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Spirit.

The same Upper Room where Jesus washed their feet and asked them to do likewise, for he came among us as one who serves. Christ's presence is found in service, in humility, in washing away the grime and dirt we find in the world and within our own hearts, washing away everything and anything that undermines our dignity, that blurs our image as sons and daughters of God.

The Spirit of the living God reminds these women and men why they left everything to follow Jesus, because he alone is the source of salvation, he alone has the message of eternal life, he alone can teach us what it truly means to act justly, walk humbly and love tenderly. The Holy Spirit certainly causes a ruckus in their lives, stirs them up and sends them out. Everyone should have access to the Good News, no one should be denied knowledge of the one true God in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the driving force of the Church, but the Holy Spirit is not under our control, is not confined to the Church, the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills, She cannot be confined.

We are very much aware of the power of wind and fire. We have experienced the devastating effect of hurricanes. We have recently witnessed in Kansas and Texas the power of Tornadoes, and last summer we watched in horror the devastating fires in California. Yes, we are very much aware of the power of wind and fire, the two words used to describe the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. We naturally look for words to describe an experience, these two words were used by those in the Upper Room to express the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit burned love and certainty in their hearts and blew away complacency, excuses and fear, the very things which held them back from fulfilling their mission.

Like a mother dove pushing her fledglings from the nest, the Holy Spirit pushed these fledgling disciples from the security of the house out in to the world, with the knowledge and words necessary to do what the Church in every age is meant to do: to proclaim in every language, in every place, in every culture, that Jesus Christ has died and is risen, and has done so precisely out of love for us. No longer fearful of the enemies of Jesus, no longer timid about how to speak or what to say, no longer concerned about what others may think of them, the disciples go forth with a power not of their own making, and do what fifty days ago seemed nothing more than a dashed dream.

Let's be honest, when Jesus died his community fell apart. He had been betrayed, denied and most of his disciples fled. It was chiefly the women who accompanied him to the end. On Easter Day, he appeared to these very disciples, and blew open their hearts and minds to God's possibilities. In Christ, God triumphed over all that destroys community: sin, cowardice, lies, misunderstanding, suffering and death. The Resurrection was made visible to the world in the astonishing sight of a community reborn through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

What seemed impossible, the breaking of the shackles of evil, suffering and death, becomes possible through the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the gift of the Spirit of everlasting love and life.

And now it is over to us. We too have received the same Spirit which should have blown the fear out of us, and put fire in our own bellies to cause a ruckus. Yes, the Church has not had an easy time of late. We have been shocked, embarrassed, ashamed of what has been done by those in whom we place our trust, our faith. Our faith has been shaken, stirred, but hopefully not destroyed.

We should never allow the sin, failings, deception of others to take from us the most precious gift we have. The gift which gives us our identity, which proclaims our eternal worth, which allows us to cause a ruckus for truth and justice, reminding the world of whose we are, where we came from, and where our final destination lies. A faith which stirs us to take risks for others, to possess the courage to walk in the opposite direction to what some may consider to be politically correct or nationalistic; to be a voice for the voiceless, the immigrant, the refugee. To think outside a particular political box or framework so as not to compromise the truth of the Gospel. The Spirit of the living God is not a security blanket for the fainthearted, but a powerful wind blowing away complacency and apathy. Yes, this is the birthday of our Church, OUR Church, OUR birthday. We are commissioned to mold this family of faith; this is not just the prerogative of those who bear a title or particular responsibilities. The Spirit of the Living God has been given to us all: be empowered, take responsibility, cause a ruckus, and together let us renew the face of the earth! Amen, Alleluia!