

Pentecost year B 2018 Deacon Kevin T. Mastellon

Quite a few years ago Kathy and I were in Toronto on a get-away weekend. We found a nice restaurant on Yonge Street Downtown and were enjoying our meal when there was a commotion. We noticed all the wait staff scurrying to one table and they broke out in a song...

Happy birthday.....to you. Happy birthday.....to you. Happy birthday dear .....happy birthday.....to you. *(for readers...the timing is completely different from our customary rendition.)*

We have seen that same ritual in many a restaurant but never performed quite that way. The melody was intentionally distorted. It did not match the birthday song we all knew....but it was the same.

I thought about that "event" as I read the scripture accounts of our birthday today. Pentecost is the birthday of the church....the day Jesus' promise to his disciples came true. "if you love me, you will keep my commandments and I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always." The Holy Spirit of God.

That birthday song as it was sung in Toronto occurred to me because it was wrong. I mean it was right but it was wrong. It did not match the melody and timing and phrasing that I know.

Some would suggest our church is in the same place. There's something wrong. The song just doesn't feel the same.

Attendance at mass is down....the number of baptisms and weddings have declined dramatically. We are consolidating and merging parishes in part because of a decline in the number of vocations to the priesthood, in part because the number of supporting parishioners is declining too .... And as generous as folks are...it is tough to keep things going as they used to be.

But this is not the time for "woe is me". When God sent his Spirit to support the work of the Apostles and their successors it was not a short term commitment...this was no thirty day covenant.

Jesus told his apostles, "as the Father has sent me, so I send you."

We sang of God as creator and provider in our psalm, calling on God to send out his spirit "and renew the face of the earth." Renew the face of the earth.

I see this period of challenge and change for our church as just that...a renewal...a gift from God to renew the face of the Church as we know it. The face of the earth is changed for all time every time the Holy Spirit is sent by God.

Certainly the world Jesus and the apostles occupied changed....was renewed in that precious moment. It, coupled with Jesus' passion and his ascension to the Father formed the fulfillment of all that had been promised in the Jewish tradition and scripture.

In that moment when Jesus breathed on the Apostles and shared the Holy Spirit with them, and directed them to go forth and teach the good news and do battle with the evil one, the world changed. It was renewed.

Our church in Watertown has been renewed by those who have been baptized this year; those who were confirmed last week; those who joined our churches and professed their faith on Holy Saturday; those who received the Eucharist for the first time in the last couple of weeks; those who have left this life to share eternal life with the Lord.....

We are redefined, recast, renewed by each of these events because, as St. Paul reminded the Corinthians, The face of the earth changed because all these people heard and felt the presence of the Holy Spirit inspiring them, as St. Paul told the people of Corinth...the manifestations of the Holy Spirit are given to each individual for some benefit.

St. Basil the Great likens the Holy Spirit to the Sun. It shines on everyone yet each individual feels the sun's presence as if meant for only me. "To all creatures he gives a delight," Bishop Basil wrote, "a delight limited only by each receiver's nature, not by the Holy Spirit's ability to give."

And how will all those mentioned earlier change the world? Those enlightened by the Spirit, St. Basil says, become spiritual themselves and a source of grace for others.

Paul says of those who received the Spirit:

They may have received different kinds of spiritual gifts; they may use their gifts for different forms of service to the people of God; the Spirit may be at work in differing ways in each of them but make no mistake...the Holy Spirit is at work in each of them and the Spirit in each has come from the same God who produces all those gifts in everyone.

They will renew our Church and our world. And they represent millions across our world who received the gifts of the Holy Spirit in this Easter Season. Each of us is called too...we are commissioned to renew our church and our world through the same presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Church exists to give glory to God and to continue Christ's work of salvation, which includes redemption from sin, by proclaiming the Good news of God's saving presence.

In our Eucharist today, in our prayers of thanksgiving and petition, we ask God to continue to send forth his Spirit....and renew the face of the earth.