

Pentecost
5/28/2023

HOW WE DO IT

Last Sunday we celebrated the Ascension of our Lord. Jesus gave the disciples, gave the Church, a four-fold mission. They were to go forth, to make disciples of all nations, to baptize and to teach people to carry out all his commandments. –Now that’s a tall order to say the least. How are they to do all that?

The answer comes this week. They are to do it with the strength and the power of God that comes through the Holy Spirit, not by themselves. Before the ascension, Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit who would come and lead and guide them in all truth, and remind them of all that he had taught them. Ten days later on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, the fiftieth day, it happened. Those who had once been timid now went out to proclaim boldly. They spoke in such a way that everyone understood them.

There are two that the Father sent: the Son and Holy Spirit. In Jesus, through the Incarnation, God entered into our world in a very real and visible way. By the Holy Spirit, God entered into our world in a very real but *invisible* way. The Holy Spirit is like the wind. You can’t see the wind but you can see the effects of the wind; in the sails of ships, in trees, in kites. We may not be able to see the wind but we all know that it’s real. So too, we might not see the Holy Spirit but we see the effects of the Holy Spirit.

We see the effects of the Holy Spirit when people, by his grace, do what naturally speaking we consider either hard, impossible or foolish. We see the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the saints. When we look at a painting we usually don’t see the artist but the work of the artist. The lives of the saints can be seen as the artwork of the Holy Spirit. We see it in the lives of people like Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was a quiet and shy man but who became an outspoken champion of the oppressed and poor in El Salvador and who was killed while celebrating Mass. We see it in people like Mother Teresa, who devoted herself so completely to loving Christ in the poorest of the poor. We see the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people around us who live the challenge of the Christian life with great love and joy and who are living lives marked by the workings of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is at work in the life of the Church and in our own individual lives. The Church received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and we also receive the Holy Spirit, particularly through Baptism and Confirmation. For our faith to make any sense, it's essential to believe that somehow, some way, the Holy Spirit is at work. Hopefully, by the lives we live, the Holy Spirit is working through us but it's also comforting to realize that the Holy Spirit can work in spite of us.

Now if you have studied Church history or even some contemporary events, you will realize that at times, we can slow down and even block the work of the Holy Spirit but even then we have to believe that the Holy Spirit continues to be at work in the life of the Church. In other words, even when we mess things up, the Holy Spirit can bring good out of evil. The evil remains evil but the Holy Spirit can bring forth good from it.

One way the Holy Spirit can do this is through our memory. On Holy Thursday Jesus told the disciples that: *The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.* —The Holy Spirit teaches us and reminds us of what Jesus has told us. You could say that the Holy Spirit functions as the memory of the Church.

When we want to lash out, perhaps the Holy Spirit will remind us that Jesus told us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. When we're tempted to lie, perhaps the Spirit of Truth as Jesus called him, will remind us to ground our lives in truth and not to lie. When we find ourselves turning away from those in need, perhaps the Holy Spirit, also known as the Father of the Poor, will remind us of Jesus' words: *What you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.* When we're down, perhaps the Holy Spirit also known as the Comforter, will console us with Jesus' words: *Come to me all you who are weary or Do not let your hearts be troubled.*

The Holy Spirit is at work in our lives and the life of the Church and although the Holy Spirit can work in spite of us, the goal is to allow the Holy Spirit to work through us ever more brightly. This can happen when we grow in self-gift, opening our hearts more and more to God's and responding with greater generosity; with lives of intentional faith where seek with the grace of the Holy Spirit to live lives that are holy, not just lives that aren't too bad but lives that are holy.

We do it by worthily sharing in the sacraments, especially Reconciliation and the Eucharist. We do it by letting ourselves be formed by the word of God daily and by a life of daily prayer, always in harmony with our state in life. We do it by seeking to see and serve Christ in those we meet, especially those in need and by accepting the joys, sorrows and inconveniences of daily life as a way of growing in holiness, at times in big ways but certainly in every *little way*.

The Holy Spirit strengthens us as individuals and as the Church to go forth, to make disciples of all nations, to baptize and to teach people to carry out all his commandments and to share the new life to which we are led by the Holy Spirit.