

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Pentecost Sunday 2018

Pentecost Sunday

Immaculate Conception, Towson

May 20, 2018

First, let me say how good it is to return to Immaculate Conception to celebrate this wonderful feast, the Solemnity of Pentecost. It is that day when the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles, the Virgin Mary, and their companions, gathered for prayer in the Upper Room. It is that day when the Church, the Body of Christ, was born in the power of the Spirit.

My recollection is that I was last here on Christmas Eve, three years ago. I was also here in 2012 for the Feast of Pentecost. You'll be happy to know that I'm not delivering the same homily today! So now, we've come full circle... but not with taking time to express our deepest thanks to Fr. Joe Barr for his leadership of Immaculate Conception Parish... Fr. Joe our warmest thanks! And with you I am very grateful to you, Fr. Francis, for sharing the first years of your priestly ministry here at Immaculate Conception and to you, Msgr. Tillman for your long and loving priestly service to the Church! I also want to thank this parish for your focus on priestly vocations. The Archdiocese is blessed with a growing number of seminarians and Immaculate Conception has sent us some excellent candidates - thank you! This parish is made all the more vibrant by its successful and flourishing school. I'd like to thank and acknowledge the principal of ICS, Madeline Meaney, for her longtime dedication and leadership in helping to build ICS into one of the finest schools in the Archdiocese!

Let's turn now to the great feast we celebrate, the coming of the Holy Spirit, by reminding ourselves of an experience that we've all had at one time or another, and it's this: we have to write an essay or a report and we just can't get started. We start writing, we look at the first few sentences, and we push delete. We try again but somehow the muse has forsaken us, the words won't flow. We decide to go to the kitchen for coffee and/or a snack or we take a walk but the clock is ticking and soon

the essay or the report will be due. And what we end up producing is drier than dust. Did that ever happen to you? It did to me when a bishop asked me to write something for the Bishops' Conference and the bishop added, I asked you because you write well and very quickly too. Because that bishop said this, I was immediately seized with writer's block... until I took my notes and research – lock, stock, and barrel – into chapel and asked the Holy Spirit to help me in my poverty to put pen to paper... Whether the Spirit actually granted my request is a matter for another day!

I would maintain that as followers of Christ we sometimes suffer from something a little like writer's block: we try to believe what our faith teaches and we try to live that faith but often without resorting to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In fact, I might even say that we regard our faith as we might regard an essay – a word which, as you know, has two meanings: First, it's that short article over which we labor, sometimes without much success. And second, the word "essay" also means an attempt or effort or an endeavor. Without implying that living our faith is effortless, let me say that we sometimes think of our faith as just another obligation, something else in life that demands our attention, our energy, and our exertion.

In a beautiful new letter entitled "Rejoice and Be Glad", Pope Francis steers us away from imagining that our living our faith is the direct result of our unaided efforts – without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and without the aid of God's grace. Now, most of us who fall into that erroneous way of thinking don't think of ourselves as heretics. But Pope Francis reminds us that this sort of thinking is actually heretical! – It's called Pelagianism – named for a British monk, Pelagius, who lived in the 4th and 5th centuries. And I can tell you, I'm not immune from this way of thinking. In the morning I'll spend time in prayer & ask the Lord's help throughout the day but in my heart of hearts, I imagine myself to be in the driver's seat, until, of course, something comes along, as it usually does, to remind me that in my relationship with Jesus, I'm not the senior partner!

I take comfort, though, because Jesus's first followers had to learn the same lesson. When they tried to follow Jesus with their own strength and intuition, they failed. They thought they understood his teaching but they were continually falling short. They felt they were brave and bold enough to follow him, even in time of danger, but

when Jesus was arrested, condemned, and crucified, for the most part, they betrayed him and they fled. Even when the glorified Lord appeared to them after his Resurrection, amazed and joyful as they were, they were still hesitant, confused, even doubtful. Only when the Holy Spirit came upon them did they become true followers of Jesus. The Spirit opened their minds to all that Jesus taught them. The Spirit strengthened their wills so that they were no longer fearful. The Spirit inspired their speech and loosened their tongue so that they could go forth and proclaim the Good News of Salvation in Jesus Christ.

And the good news for us is that Pentecost is not a one-off event. It continues in the daily life of the Church of which you and I are a part. When we were baptized and confirmed, we received the same gifts as the Apostles and their companions at Pentecost. Every time we go to Mass, Jesus imparts his Spirit to us and whenever we go to Confession our sins are forgiven for the Spirit connects us to the saving power of Jesus' death & resurrection. And as we spend time in quiet prayer, reading Scripture, opening our heart to the Lord, pouring out our needs, giving God thanks and praise, adoring the Lord who is all good - whenever we do this, the Spirit comes to our aid. What's more, if we open our hearts to the Spirit, we'll be surprised at our ability to share our faith with others, including those who are estranged from the Church for any number of reasons. Similarly, when we go out of our way for someone in need, a poor person on the streets, a person who is sick or grieving, a family member or a co-worker in need of a word of encouragement, the Holy Spirit is doing more in us than we could ever do, left to our own devices.

In other words, it's the Holy Spirit who frees us not just from writer's block but from all that prevents us from living our faith with joy and conviction. The Spirit frees us to pursue holiness, to live as the Lord's disciples, to be active members of Christ's Body, the Church, and to bear witness to Christ even in this divided and often dangerous world. In and through the Spirit, we dare to cling to a hope and peace the world cannot give! May God bless us and keep us in love!