

[Opinion](#)

[Spirituality](#)

[Scripture for Life](#)



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June 8, 2019

Pentecost Sunday

[June 9, 2019](#)

Acts 2:1-11

Psalm 104

1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

or

Romans 8:8-17

John 20:19-23

or

John 14:15-16, 23b-26

I once asked a friend of mine when she had gotten married. She said, "We were married from the moment we decided that we would spend the rest of our lives building up our love. Our wedding celebrated that." Another friend told me that his marriage happened over and over each time he and his wife confronted problems and decided again to make it work.

We tend to think that there are moments that change us forever. We might refer to the time when we allowed ourselves to fall in love. It could be the day of becoming a parent or being ordained or making a lifelong commitment.

But the more we think about those events, the more we realize these were, at most, signal moments in a much bigger process. We can discover the seeds of our "new" identity appearing years before we had any idea of what they meant. People become parents on the day of the birth or adoption of their first child, but they will spend the rest of their days making their parenthood come true through their

relationship to their children.

Anyone who has striven over time to remain faithful knows that a commitment expressed in a moment necessarily passes through a lifetime of growth and development, of deepening and testing, of becoming ever truer. That is one dimension of what the Christian Scriptures present in the variety of Pentecost accounts.

Luke gives us a full 50 days of post-Resurrection appearances, instructions and waiting, before the disciples experienced their baptism by fire and the Holy Spirit. According to John, Jesus breathed the Spirit into the disciples on the evening of the "first day of the week." In reality, the Spirit's action in them started when they met Jesus and deepened each time they acted in Jesus' name.

Today, our psalm has us pray, "Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth." We should be careful about praying that, because God could take us at our word.

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that when the disciples began to preach, the people were confused because they all understood them in their own language. People who were accustomed to boundaries that divided one group from another suddenly found themselves swept up in the same movement. The old, easy separations fell away as a bunch of yokel Galileans shared a message that made their hopes sail and set their hearts on fire. But that is the least of it.

On the day when the resurrected Christ first became present in their midst, the disciples were struggling to take in the fact that death wasn't what they thought it was, that Jesus was risen, and that he had come to them offering peace.



(Mark Bartholomew)

In the midst of their dizzying confusion, Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He was not simply forgiving them but inviting them to share in his own relationship with God.

So just as God the Creator had done after fashioning the human creature, Jesus breathed over them, suffusing them with his Spirit and his mission. Then, he gave them the one necessary command that would keep his mission alive in and through them: "Forgive."

That was it. No catechism, no dogma, no institution; no orders, hierarchy, hymns or liturgy. Just forgiveness.

As time went on, they did develop liturgy, catechisms, hymns and the rest. The intent was to provide structures, occasions, shared human spaces, in which Jesus' mission could come to life. Sometimes, it worked.

The feast of Pentecost celebrates a key moment of the Spirit's ever-renewing presence in our lives. Pentecost functions like a movement that breaks down the boundaries of time and culture, and most of all, of our settled and certain attitudes that are epitomized in an unwillingness to forgive.

The symbol of multiple languages represents everything that divides us, everything that truncates communion. Pentecost proclaims that God created our diversity to enrich us so that understanding one another would lead us to grow in community with all of God's beloved.

Paul's message to the Corinthians says as much. The Spirit gives a variety of gifts without which the whole cannot be truly holy.

If we want Pentecost to come to life in us, today's Scriptures tell us that forgiveness is the place to start. First, as the opening rite of the eucharistic celebration teaches us, we need to accept ourselves as beloved and forgiven sinners. Today's Gospel demonstrates that knowing and accepting that truth about ourselves opens us to the Spirit.

According to the model of today's Gospel, the second step in our Pentecost process is to become involved in reconciliation by forgiving and by being agents of forgiveness who help others learn that it is possible. Pentecost is a long process.

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