

Pentecost Sunday
May 23, 2010

“The Great Liberator”

Today is the feast of Pentecost, the day that the Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples and filled them with the Spirit of God and the gifts of the Spirit.

The Acts of the Apostles written some fifty years later by Luke accurately relates the story. The story is a story of transformation. The death of Jesus had so devastated the Apostles and the closest of Jesus' friends that all they could think to do was to hide in Jerusalem. Initially, that was easy to do, but during the great feast, it was much more difficult. Crowds filled the city from far and wide especially Jews journeying back from abroad. The increased traffic and people brought both the Temple Guard and the Roman army out in force, manning all the main gates, crossroads and important buildings.

The disciples feared to leave the upper room, insisting on the doors and windows being barred and shattered. What happened to the Apostles in those early hours of that Sunday morning was so powerful that by noon it had transformed their lives and the lives of many in Jerusalem.

Pentecost in a single story, represents a revolution that truly occupied the first fifty years of Christianity. The only thing we could compare it to is the transformation that took place in the American colonies between 1763 and say 1789.

No wonder the Christians came under persecution from both Jews and Romans amazed at the growth of this embryonic group. The rise of Christianity was a cultural revolution such as the world had never seen before. It stood in stark contrast to Greek and Roman cruelty that had ruled the world for 400 years.

Christianity was a liberating force, especially in a Roman world where 2/3 of the population were slaves. Christianity became synonymous with freedom and with love.

Pentecost today should speak to us also of freedom, but a more personal kind of freedom. For we live in a world that too often enslaves itself especially here in the West.

We have been slaves for decades to commercialism and materialism. Whether we want it or not, we have been told that, we need it. We need a bigger house, more acres and a driveway long enough to deter the most adventurous thief. We need the extra car, the boat, the time-share and the little place in Maine. You need your 403K to support your 401K in case it fails. You need extra insurance just in case you die and your poor kids, who you paid through college, set up in a house, might be saddled with paying for your casket.

Then of course, we are now all slaves to technology, television, news media and much more. Americans however are also slaves to work, work and more work. We are so enslaved by work, that

we will come home for holidays, feel guilty and spend all three days working in the yard, returning to our jobs after the holidays, exhausted.

Pentecost teaches us that we have to sit down and think out what is truly important for our lives. Jesus, his teaching, family, relationships, justice, equality, these are things that are important every thing else really does not matter.

John Bosco. The great 19th century saint and scholar chose as his motto: "Da mihi aminos cetera tolle." Give me spirits, the every soul of people, everything else you can take away.

Spending time with people, listening to their concerns has to be so important for us in our technological age. I will choose to shop in a store that trains its staff to be kind and helpful to customers. I will not be put on hold, have music played to me, or have someone switch me because: "I just have to take this call." Have you recently had a conversation with a friend who at the same time as she is talking to you is on her cell phone to someone else? Have you been stopped at the light too long because the car ahead of you is on her cell phone?

Pentecost points us to Jesus, his values and his teaching. It tells us to liberate ourselves and set ourselves free.

When we allow the Holy Spirit to enter our lives, we are inviting in the Great Liberator. Luke's story tells us: The Holy Spirit banishes fear with the speed of a flame.

He gives knowledge where stupidity and ignorance once reigned. He brings understanding that replaces conflict.

Counseling that brings peace.

He imparts wisdom, the wisdom that frees us from all that imprisons us and puts us back on the road to salvation and our destiny as children of God.

Amen+

