

Pentecost 2010 (C)¹
Homily – St. Benedict’s Parish
22/23 May 2010



*St. Benedict's Church
Vestibule window (detail)*

A story...

Some nuns once inherited three very naughty female parrots.
Every time a man walked into the house, the lead female parrot squawked
“hey cutie! You want a little action?”

Wouldn't you know it, the bishop came over to visit.
Sure enough, he walks in and the lead female parrot squawks
“hey cutie! You want a little action?”

The nuns were mortified.

But the Bishop said “what are the chances? I happen to have three MALE parrots at home.
They are so holy! They pray the Rosary all day. Maybe if you bring your parrots over, my
parrots will convert them.”

So the nuns brought the parrots over.
As soon as the lead female parrot saw the male parrots she squawked
“hey cutie! You want a little action?”

And the lead Male parrot looked over his shoulder and said...
“put away your beads boys, our prayers have been answered!!!”²

Sometimes you get what you pray for Church!

¹ The Vigil Readings were used on Saturday with Gen 11:1-9 as the First Reading .
Option A for the Second Reading (1 Corinthians) and Option A for the Gospel (John 20) were used for Pentecost
Day.

² I heard this joke from Br. Peter Killeen, F.S.C. in 2007. It's risqué for church, but I went with it anyway. My
apologies if I offended any prudish parrots.

For twelve years as a Deacon,³ I have wanted to preach on Pentecost. I have things to say! Please indulge me a bit. Deacons don't usually get to preach on important days like this, so today I am filled with the Holy Spirit and feel like preaching! I've got twelve years of homily material saved up!

I'm a bit nervous though...I am conscious of St. Stephen⁴ - another deacon, full of the Holy Spirit. When he preached too long, the people stoned him to death!⁵ Hopefully, you will be more kind.

Sometimes you get what you pray for!
From Ascension Thursday until today, for nine days – the first novena – the Church prays for the Holy Spirit.⁶

And now “Spirit of the Living God, fall a-fresh on us!”⁷
“In our house now make your home.”⁸

So what is this Spirit anyway?

We profess that the Holy Spirit is “the Lord and Giver of Life.”⁹

A little word study... spiritus in Latin; or Geist in German, (hence our word “Ghost” as in *Come Holy Ghost*); or ruah in Hebrew or pneuma in Greek -- all mean “spirit” or “breath.” [blew softly into microphone]

We just heard it in Psalm 104 which N.¹⁰ led us in singing. “If you take away their breath they perish and return to the dust.”¹¹

³ I was Ordained June 1998.

⁴ I had a small icon of St. Stephen (which I brought home from St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai) in front of me during much of the preparation of this homily.

⁵ See Acts 7:54-60.

⁶ See Acts 1:13-14.

⁷ *Spirit of the Living God* words and music by Daniel Iverson, 1935/1963, Moody Press. This was the Processional song at the 10 AM Mass. It was played at other Masses too.

⁸ From Sequence, *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, an inclusive translation was used at Pentecost day Masses. See Parish Blog for brief commentary and Latin text - <http://stbenedictsamherstnyblog.blogspot.com/2010/05/on-holy-spirit.html>.

⁹ See John Paul II's *Dominus et Vivificantem* 1, (18 May 1986), particularly apropos of the Vigil Gospel pericope: *The Church professes her faith in the Holy Spirit as "the Lord, the giver of life." She professes this in the Creed which is called Nicene-Constantinopolitan from the name of the two Councils-of-Nicaea (A.D. 325) and Constantinople (A.D. 381)-at which it was formulated or promulgated. It also contains the statement that the Holy Spirit "has spoken through the Prophets." These are words which the Church receives from the very source of her faith, Jesus Christ. In fact, according to the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit is given to us with the new life, as Jesus foretells and promises on the great day of the Feast of Tabernacles: "If any one thirst let him come to me and drink. He who believeth in me as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" And the Evangelist explains: "This he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive." It is the same simile of water which Jesus uses in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, when he speaks of "a spring of water welling up to eternal life," and in his conversation with Nicodemus when he speaks of the need for a new birth "of water and the Holy Spirit" in order to "enter the kingdom of God." The Church, therefore, instructed by the words of Christ, and drawing on the experience of Pentecost and her own apostolic history, has proclaimed since the earliest centuries her faith in the Holy Spirit, as the giver of life, the one in whom the inscrutable Triune God communicates himself to human beings, constituting in them the source of eternal life.*

¹⁰ The Cantor was named here - Chris Wietig at the Vigil, Sarah Rodman at the 8 & 10 AM Masses and David Croglia at 11:30 AM. Our other weekend cantor – Diane Battaglia (formerly Berghash) was married Saturday at noon. Congratulations!

¹¹ Psalm 104:29.

Remember the story of Adam? “Adam” means man; from “adama,” Hebrew for dust/ground. In the story, God shapes Adam on the ground, but Adam doesn’t come to life until God breathes into him.¹²

Likewise with our Church. As the Apostles were gathered in the Upper Room, a “loud, driving wind”¹³ was heard. This is God’s breath bringing His Church to life! Filling us with His Spirit!

I recall a blessing I received from a Coptic Priest in Cairo.¹⁴ Although he didn’t speak English and I didn’t speak Arabic,¹⁵ I knew exactly what he meant when he took my head in his hands and blew all over my face. [blew softly into microphone] He was sending the Spirit upon me. Church! languages are not a barrier to people who know Jesus and His Spirit! We understood each other perfectly.¹⁶

“Spirit of the Living God fall a-fresh on us.”¹⁷

“Our soul’s gentle welcome guest.”¹⁸

So what is this Spirit anyway? **The Spirit is what unites us in Love.**

And here I have to do a little correction... sometimes less-careful Christians think that “spirit” means “emotion” or getting “excited,” like at a football game. Well, I know that there are some widows and widowers here today who cannot get up and dance right now, their lives have grown quieter than ours. Don’t you dare tell me they lack the Spirit! Every breath they take is a reminder of God’s Spirit in them! Or let me show you some young people in this parish whose hearts are broken because they just broke up with someone they loved; don’t tell me they lack the Spirit because they can’t sing or praise as loudly you right now. Sometimes the Spirit helps us carry crosses; It helps us be more like Jesus.

The Spirit is what unites us in Love. St. Augustine put it this way:¹⁹ The Love of the Father for the Son, and the Love of the Son for the Father, is so great that a Third Person is begotten, Love Itself – the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit flows from Jesus, like water, for a thirsty generation.²⁰

¹² See Genesis 2: 7.

¹³ Acts 2:2.

¹⁴ In the Zabaleen District, Summer of 2007.

¹⁵ Arabs and Egyptians - I was conscious of their mention in the Pentecost Day 1st Reading, Acts 2:11–12.

¹⁶ See Acts 2:6.

¹⁷ *Spirit of the Living God*, op.cit.

¹⁸ From Sequence, op.cit.

¹⁹ See St. Augustine’s *On the Trinity* XV.18.32, 19.37. *Wherefore, if Holy Scripture proclaims that God is love, and that love is of God, and works this in us that we abide in God and He in us, and that hereby we know this, because He has given us of His Spirit, then the Spirit Himself is God, who is love. Next, if there be among the gifts of God none greater than love, and there is no greater gift of God than the Holy Spirit, what follows more naturally than that He is Himself love, who is called both God and of God? And if the love by which the Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father, ineffably demonstrates the communion of both, what is more suitable than that He should be specially called love, who is the Spirit common to both? For this is the sounder thing both to believe and to understand, that the Holy Spirit is not alone love in that Trinity, yet is not specially called love to no purpose.*

²⁰ See John 7: 38b–39 in Gospel pericope for Pentecost Vigil. Please consult note on this verse in NAB. I went with a “filioque” reading.

Let anyone who thirsts come to Jesus and drink.²¹

Wade in spirit-filled waters a bit, Church!

After all, you were born again,²² *re-created*, through water – hear them gurgling?²³ - AND the Holy Spirit. Wade in the waters²⁴ of baptism a bit, Church!

The Spirit...

Intercedes for us,²⁵ sanctifies us, guides us, comforts us, renews us...

The Spirit...

Melts us, molds us, fills us, uses us.²⁶

“Brothers and Sisters – no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit!”²⁷

In fact, every good thing we Christians do is done: Through Jesus, With Jesus, In Jesus, in the UNITY of the Holy Spirit.²⁸

So “Spirit of the Living God, fall a-fresh on us.”²⁹

“Fill with faith our human race.”³⁰

The Spirit is here Church! Right here! Right Now!

Pentecost is when you *realize* that. I mean that literally...Pentecost is when you make the Spirit REAL; when you use the gifts the Spirit has given you.

Believe me Church, you are gifted people!

I know people...I’ve seen my share of people...you are gifted.

I’ve come to know many of you in the five years I’ve been here...I know your amazing generosity, work ethic, accomplishments, - I know you are gifted by the Spirit.

I’ve prayed with Jews in Jerusalem.³¹

I’ve studied with Muslims in Alexandria.

But I brought your Spirit, Church!

I’ve walked with Communists in Saigon

And broken bread with Bedouins in the Sahara.

But I brought your Spirit, Church!

²¹ See John 7:37.

²² See John 3:1–15.

²³ The Easter Baptismal font contained gurgling fountain this year.

²⁴ The Spiritual with this title was sung at the 10 AM Mass.

²⁵ See Romans 8:26 - the Second Reading at the Pentecost Vigil.

²⁶ Words adapted from *Spirit of the Living God*, op. cit.

²⁷ See 1 Corinthians 12:3b - Second Reading for Pentecost.

²⁸ See the Doxology of the Eucharistic Prayers.

²⁹ *Spirit of the Living God*, op.cit.

³⁰ From Sequence, op.cit.

³¹ I will resist documenting each trip; all took place within the past four years.

I've "pubbed" with pagans in Dublin
And "supped" with secular humanists in San Francisco.
But you have more Spirit!

I've chilled with Hare Krishnas in Heathrow
And visited a Shinto Shrine in Tokyo.
But your Spirit filled me!

I've taught animists in Kenya
And Buddhists in Bangkok.
But I brought your Spirit, Church!

I've been all over the US and yes, I've even been to Canada!
(and you thought I just walked the streets!)

But on Pentecost there is no where I'd rather be than with you, - right here, right now!³²

This is my, this is *our*, Spirit-filled home.
There is one Body and one Spirit,³³ but so many gifts here.

"Spirit of the Living God, fall a-fresh on us."³⁴
"Joy for all time and all places!"³⁵

Realize this, "faithful ones, trusting daughters, trusting sons..."³⁶
"Through the Spirit... we attain what is beyond our most sublime aspirations.
We become God."³⁷

Realize this!

I would never have the courage to say that had not St. Basil the Great said it first!,

"Through the Spirit...we attain what is beyond our most sublime aspirations.
We become God."³⁸

So, ... you have God's work to do, Church!
Don't you dare leave the Spirit in this "upper room,"³⁹ this building!
Your gifts and your Spirit are for the world!

³² I was thinking of the well-known Buffalo Bills coach, Marv Levy, who asked "Where else would you rather be than right here, right now?" to the team before Superbowl XV. See <http://www.marvlevy.net/quotes.html> accessed 24 May 2010. He had a book with a similar title.

³³ See First Corinthians 12 - Second Reading for Pentecost.

³⁴ *Spirit of the Living God*, op.cit.

³⁵ From Sequence, op.cit.

³⁶ From Sequence, op.cit.

³⁷ St. Basil the Great *On the Holy Spirit* Chapter 9:22-23, given in the Liturgy of the Hours, Office of Readings, for Tuesday of the 7th Week of Easter (PG 32, 107-110): *Through the Spirit we acquire a likeness to God ;indeed, we attain what is beyond our most sublime aspirations -- we become God*. See: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3203.htm> and Parish Blog - <http://stbenedictsamherstnyblog.blogspot.com/2010/05/on-holy-spirit.html>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See Acts 1:13.

So GO!

Go and preach the Gospel.

Go water those dry souls you know! Soothe suffering! Cool tempers! Heal the wounded!

Go, melt the frozen!, warm the chilled!,
cure ills!, guide wills!

Bend the hardened heart and mind!⁴⁰

Go ye, therefore, and teach every nation, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!⁴¹

Don't be afraid!⁴²

This is our Faith!

This is the Faith of the Church!

We are proud to profess it, in Christ Jesus our Lord!⁴³

[The Renewal of Baptismal Promises and Sprinkling followed at all Masses.]

⁴⁰ From Sequence, op.cit.

⁴¹ Matthew 28:19.

⁴² See Matthew 28:5.

⁴³ Rite of Baptism for Children, 96.

SUPPLEMENTS:

Since music figured heavily today's homily, here are the selections from Glen Hufnagel for this weekend:

Music for the Vigil, 8 AM and 11:30 AM Masses:

Entrance: "Now," #12 on hymn sheet.

Gloria of the Bells, RS 393

Psalm 104: 5 p.m. and 8 a.m.: antiphon RS 144, verses from sheet I gave you--use verses for the vigil on Saturday, for the feast on Sunday. 11:30 a.m.: "Envía tu espíritu," BB 462, with verses from separate sheet.

Celtic Alleluia, with verse for Pentecost

Gifts: "Sing A New Church," BB 400

Communion: "One Bread, One Body," RS 915/ BB 348. At 11:30, choir will sing "Veni, Sancte Spiritus" (BB #33, p. 99) after the communion hymn.

Recessional: "Come, Holy Ghost," RS 611

Music for the 10 AM Mass:

Entrance: "Spirit of the Living God," call-response, Jarvin leads.

Gloria of the Bells, RS 393

Psalm 104: "Envía tu espíritu," BB 462, with verses I gave you last week.

Celtic Alleluia with verse for Pentecost

Gifts: "Wade in the Water," (words at BB 642) arrangement we prepared for Confirmation--David sings verses.

Communion: "One Bread, One Body," RS 915/ BB 348

Praise song: "How Great Is Our God"

Recessional: "Go Ye Therefore," #3 on hymn sheet

BB – Breaking Bread book

RS - Ritual Song book