June 09, 2019
Pentecost Sunday 2019: “Celebrating Our Church!”
Deacon Dave Snyder

Reading 1 Acts 2:1-11
When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, “Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.”

Reading 2 Romans 8:8-17
Brothers and sisters: Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you. Consequently, brothers and sisters, we are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a Spirit of adoption, through whom we cry, “Abba, Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Sequence Veni, Sancte Spiritus
Come, Holy Spirit, come! And from your celestial home Shed a ray of light divine! Come, Father of the poor! Come, source of all our store! Come, within our bosoms shine.
You, of comforters the best; You, the soul’s most welcome guest; Sweet refreshment here below;
In our labor, rest most sweet; Grateful coolness in the heat; Solace in the midst of woe.
O most blessed Light divine, Shine within these hearts of yours, And our inmost being fill!
Where you are not, we have naught, Nothing good in deed or thought, Nothing free from taint of ill.
Heal our wounds, our strength renew; On our dryness pour your dew; Wash the stains of guilt away:
Bend the stubborn heart and will; Melt the frozen, warm the chill; Guide the steps that go astray.
On the faithful, who adore And confess you, evermore In your sevenfold gift descend;
Give them virtue’s sure reward; Give them your salvation, Lord; Give them joys that never end. Amen. Alleluia.

Gospel John 14:15-16, 23B-26
Jesus said to his disciples: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always.
“Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Those who do not love me do not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me.
“I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.”
HOMILY

I would suppose that many of you just had a work-week like I did, filled with plenty of stresses trying to accomplish everything on the “to-do” list. So, Friday at noon time, I moved my car to a very quiet spot in the large parking lot that surrounds my workplace to relax a little, and enjoy what I like to call a SNAP, a short nap. It was a beautiful, sunny day and no wind at all – nothing, so I opened my two front car windows about 4 or 5 inches each to avoid over-heating from the sun. A homily message had been on my mind as I dozed off, and it returned to me when I woke to my alarm about 15 minutes later. No sooner had I thought again about the message, then this sudden, noticeable breeze blew through the open window and into my face, and this calmness came over me – maybe I should have checked in the rear-view mirror for a flame of fire on my head, like the wind and tongues of fire in that 1st Pentecost! I sat there for another few minutes – no wind, no more noticeable breezes, just me enjoying that calm internal feeling. I said thank you to God, and went back to work, feeling remarkably less stressful. Maybe some of you have had similar experiences, where you sense the calming presence of God.

Oh, yeah, the homily …
(clearing throat and singing)
Happy Birthday to You,
Happy Birthday to You,
Happy Birthday, Dear Church,
Happy Birthday to You …

Of course, today we celebrate the birthday of our beloved Church – it’s Pentecost Sunday! We wear red today to celebrate the fire of the Holy Spirit, the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and others gathered in the room, 50 days after the Resurrection of Jesus, as described in today’s 1st Reading, from Acts. Birthdays come in all shapes and sizes, boisterous or quiet, public fanfare or private, emotional or not. So, we should be celebrating the Church’s birthday today, publicly, loudly, to show that we are proud to be a member of the Church, the Church which Jesus founded.

But, it is challenging to do that in today’s culture and society, isn’t it. Proud of the Church? It may be challenging to even admit you are Catholic!! The entertainment industry, corporate America, the self-elected PC police, and others, aided by numerous rascals on the internet, have managed to convince millions of us that organized religion, a.k.a. the Church, interferes with our freedoms and our liberties, and does us no good. Of course, the sexual scandals over the last several years have only added fuel to that fire. You likely know already that many people, especially young people, maybe even your children, family members, or good friends, are leaving the Catholic Church, the mainline and other denominational Churches, even many of the non-denominational mega-churches; they’re leaving organized religion for “spirituality.” Worse yet, some are leaving for … nothing – no Jesus, no God, nothing. In fact, a recent poll which has tracked these statistics for many years has found that, for the first time ever, the number of “nones” – not our good religious sisters, but people who do not belong to any organized religion – the number of “nones” is greater than any religious group in America. For the first time ever, there are more “nones” than Catholics … more “nones” than evangelical Christians … more “nones” than any other group. Consider how many people you know who have said that they are “spiritual” and not “religious.” Maybe “religious” at one time, but now they are … “spiritual.” How can we help turn these statistics around … how can we help – you and I and every one who loves the Church that Jesus founded – what can we do? How can we help convince others that, YES, our God is a personal God, and YES, we can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, but also, YES, there’s much more to the story than that, so much more. There’s much more than sitting in a car with the windows open and getting hit with a sudden breeze and feeling the calming presence of God, there’s much more than walking on the beach or hiking
in a forest or meditating in the quiet, and sensing the presence of God. There’s so much more to the story than that … so much more.

Who is Jesus? If you had to explain who Jesus is to a non-Christian, what would you say? Several weeks ago, Fr. Kennedy, Fr. Juan and I had the pleasure to ask that interview question to the 50 or so candidates preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation – by the way, congratulations to anyone here who did get confirmed and to your families. (Also, by the way, to those of you preparing to be confirmed next year – now you know one of the questions.) A popular answer was that Jesus showed us how we should live … but also Jesus is the Son of God and He died to save us from our sins. From our Gospel story today, Jesus and His Apostles are at the Last Supper, and He is preparing them for his impending Passion and Death. He’s telling them that God will send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to be with them after He leaves: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always. … Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.” So, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit will be with them, forever. The Holy Spirit will teach them everything and remind them of all that Jesus told them, to remind them to keep His word and to keep His commandments. These same apostles, except for Judas, were in the room when the Holy Spirit came on that First Pentecost. These same apostles formed the beginnings of the Catholic Church, the Kingdom of God on earth. … There is a very interesting video on YouTube, also available to listen to on CD and likely through FORMED.org, which features Dr. Timothy Gray and it’s titled “Religionless Spirituality – Why We Need the Church.” He notes that Jesus lived for much more than to die for our sins – that’s half the story. If Jesus came only to die for our sins, God would have let Jesus be killed by Herod, in Bethlehem … or after His first homily in Nazareth, which went so well that the listeners wanted to throw Him off a cliff … or when He was teaching in Jerusalem, when they wanted to stone Him. But, Jesus constantly evaded the authorities and never let anyone know where He was going to be next. It was only after He asked His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” and Peter answered, “You are the Messiah! The Son of the Living God,” and Jesus replied back to Peter “On this rock, I will build my Church,” did Jesus tell them that He was going to Jerusalem, to die. Jesus was born to be King of His Kingdom, and He was handing over the keys to Peter. Jesus came to establish the Church, the Church which, guided by the Holy Spirit, is to keep His word and His commandments. … I’ve only scratched the surface. I highly recommend that you watch or listen to Dr. Gray’s talk.

So, how can you and I help build up the Church, and help others feel good about the Church which Jesus founded? First, and most importantly, we need to believe in it ourselves. If we are not excited about it, or we don’t believe in it, how can we help others? We need to remember that the Holy Spirit was sent to teach us and remind us of what Jesus taught, guiding the Church through the rocky waters of imperfect people. Next, as today’s 2nd Reading tells us, we need to not live “in the flesh” where we are numero-un, “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” We need to “live in the Spirit” where God is first in our lives. And then, we have to be on guard, we have to be ready to answer anyone who challenges us, whether it’s our children, siblings, long-lost cousins George or Mabel, fellow workers, whoever, we have to be ready to say that we belong to the Church which Jesus founded and is guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church which Jesus came to establish as the Kingdom of God on earth, the Church whose members contribute more to help the poor, marginalized, disadvantaged than any other group, the Church which proudly stands for a respect for life from the moment of conception until natural death, the Church consisting of a community of believers whose Creed we will proclaim in just a minute, the Church whose Eucharistic sacrifice was instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper and which we will shortly celebrate, the Church which is the Body of Christ, and we should be proud of our Church. We should celebrate:

(singing again)

Happy Birthday, Dear Church,
Happy Birthday to You …