

Pentecost Sunday

June 5, 2022

Reflection by Sister Pat Coughlin, OSB

Acts 2:1-11; 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13; Jn 20:19-23

Pentecost is a major feast day in the Christian calendar, actually one of the major feasts that nobody has figured out how to commercialize. No plastic doves or tissue paper flames, no frantic preparations ahead of time. Let's just rejoice in the feast of metaphors that today's scripture provides that help us to understand the meaning of the feast and of the Holy Spirit. One of them is air and breath.

The gospel of John tells us that on the evening of Easter, Jesus appeared to the disciples huddled in the Upper Room, blessed them with peace, and breathed the life of God into them, and then gave them a mission. Fifty days and seven sabbaths later they got their second breath in the form of a mightier wind and flames.

Wind is air in rapid motion. Our planet is inside a protective layer of air we call atmosphere. It contains atoms of Argon which have remained the same since the atmosphere came into being. We humans breathe in about 3,000 gallons of air a day. Without constant air most living things on earth die which makes it an apt metaphor for the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the life of God being constantly given to us day after day, enlivening, enlightening creation, history, church life, our hearts, our actions. But the Holy Spirit can be dangerous.

The philosopher/poet John Donohue wrote, "I think there is a wonderful danger in God that we have totally forgotten. Because one of the things we humanoids like to do is they like to bring in the tamers to tame their deities."

Pope Francis agrees: “The Holy Spirit upsets us because the Spirit moves us, makes us walk, pushes us forward, but we want to tame the Spirit, but that is wrong.”

Barbara Brown Taylor, with her unique style, says, “The mighty wind that blew through the disciples gathered in the Upper Room must have blown the disciples out into the streets and squares where they undid the divisions of humanity caused by the Tower of Babel. They had sucked in God’s breath and they were transformed by it.”

Like air, the Holy Spirit is the power of mutual love that knits not only human beings together but all animals and plants, because we all depend on the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in each breath we take. The spirit is the great unifier in the communities of the world who come together to further the power of mutual love in the world.

Mutual love seems to be in short supply in this world: war, mass shootings, politicians lying, exploitation of the poor, refusal to accept that there is a climate crisis, irrational conspiracy theories.

But there is a good kind of conspiracy theory. The word conspiracy comes from the Latin *Con* (with), *spiratio* (breath). If we all breathe in together and then breathe out together we have created a conspiracy. The pandemic has taught us that breathing together closely can be dangerous, but if we breathe together in this sense, we share life with all creation, all humanity, all the saints and sinners who ever lived, the first breath of every baby born into this world and the last breath of every creature who ever died. Our very breath ties us to one another and the world around us. It’s a lesson we seem to struggle to remember.

St. Paul reminds us that we have different gifts, different ministries, different works. A good meditation might be gratitude for the gifts each of us has and a commitment to use them to further the power of mutual love in our world.