

Pentecost—Receiving and Sharing the Experience of the Lord.

Knowing about something is a far cry from knowing something. True story. I was ready to teach kids. Or so I thought. I was twenty years old and a religious brother with the Salesians of St. John Bosco, studying to be a priest. At that time I was referred to as Brother Joe. I was in my third year of college. I had taken education classes and religion classes. Teaching religious education to the sixth graders at Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Sparta, New Jersey, would be a piece of cake. I had never taught kids before, but I knew what I had to do. Or so I thought. I had the boys. Sr. Phyllis had the girls. Those were back in the days when everyone believed that children would learn better if their classes were not mixed. Now back to the story. Sr. Phyllis was a very beautiful young lady in her mid twenties. One Sunday she noticed that I had brought a film strip with me that she also wanted to show her girls. So she asked me if she could bring her girls in halfway through the class. "Sure," I said, not considering what I needed to do to prepare the boys for the girls' arrival. Halfway into the class, a little girl came in and asked if we were ready for the girls to come in. "Of course," I said, a bit indignant that I was being interrupted for no reason. Then the girls came in. The boys hollered, and screamed, and whistled. Then Sr. Phyllis came in. And the smallest boy in my class, with the loudest voice in the whole world shouted out, "Hey, Brother Joe, there's one for you." Needless to say, I knew all about teaching, but I didn't know what it was like to teach. Knowing about something is a far cry from knowing something.

Peter, James, John and the other disciples heard Jesus speaking about the Kingdom of God. Over and over, he taught them that they needed to have treasures in heaven. They learned about the spiritual from Jesus. But they did not know the spiritual. Consider the Transfiguration of the Lord. Peter, James and John were there when Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus. They witnessed the spiritual. But they didn't experience the spiritual within themselves. Then, on Pentecost Sunday, they had an experience of the spiritual. The Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, came upon them. Yes, there were symbols the wind and tongues of fire, but these were mere physical reflections of what was happening within them. They spoke to people from many different lands and each heard them in his or her own language. Even this was just a symbol of the Spiritual entering people everywhere through the disciples, now apostles, of Jesus Christ.

On Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit of the Father and Son filled the world with the very life principal of God. Those open to the spiritual, had an experience of the spiritual. Within moments, they provided an experience of the spiritual to others. And the Church grew. And the Church grows.

Pentecost is often called the birthday of the Church. It is far more than a historical day. It is the living reality of God's life flowing through our lives. Pentecost celebrates the intimate knowledge that we have, not the knowledge about Jesus, but the knowledge of Jesus. Pentecost celebrates our experience of the spiritual.

Sometimes people ask if religion in general or Catholicism in particular is dying. It is not. In fact it is continuing to develop, continuing to advance. The Spirit is alive! Catholicism is growing because so many people are committed to having an experience

of God and sharing this experience with others.

Consider some of the ministries of our parish. Every year we provide a spiritual experience for people from various backgrounds who seek God in their lives. We call this experience the RCIA, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, or for the children the RCIC, Rite of Christian Initiation of Children. Someone might ask, "What draws people to the Church?" A member of the RCIA ministry would reply, "It is not what, it is who. People are drawn by Jesus Christ. They sense His Presence in others. They sense His Spirit and they seek His Spirit for their own lives. **Those who know Jesus inspire others to find him.**

Another example. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays the poor of our area receive the food you have donated. We don't know these people. Perhaps, some are just drawn by free food. But many of the people served by our Community Life Ministry are aware that they receive more than food when they line up at our pantry. Many realized that they encounter the Spirit of Jesus caring for them through the people of St. Ignatius who shop each month for them. None of you think that there is anything exceptional to your shopping for the poor. You know Jesus and know that you have no choice but to join him in caring for to the poor. And the Spirit is alive in our parish.

Recently we concluded another year of religious education. Many of our teachers have made a profound impact upon their students. The teachers that made this impact were not the ones with the best teaching skills. The teachers that make an impact are the ones with the best spirit skills. Those who know Jesus pass the faith on to those who are seeking him.

This same could be said about all our ministries, Caritas, Pregnancy Center, Early Childhood Center, Guardian Angels School, Youth Ministry, Music Ministry; and the many liturgical ministries of the parish. Our ministries are successful when others experience the Spirit of the Lord working through us. Our lives are also successful when we are spiritual.

Look to your homes. You search for ways to create a Christian home, whether you are young singles or newly weds, parents with children at home or parents with children on their own, widowed or divorced, single or married, young or old. You all know that you can create a Christian home by being a person who seeks and nurtures the Spirit of Father and the Son in your lives. Yes, you can teach your children about Jesus. But they will learn Jesus from parents who allow him to animate their lives. Children like all people learn Jesus from those who have an intimate knowledge of his presence in their lives.

The Spirit of Jesus is alive and is working in the Church, right here, right now. We encounter his presence on a daily basis in every aspect of our lives.

We have been inspired. We have been empowered. We have been empowered to continue the work of Jesus Christ.

And outside, outside the Upper Room, outside the walls of the Church, outside

there are hundreds, thousands, millions of people longing for an experience of God, longing for the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit. They aren't looking for people who know about God. They are seeking people who know God. They aren't looking for people who can tell them about the spiritual. They seek spiritual people who will continue the work of imparting the Spirit.

The great work that began on Pentecost Sunday continues, pray God, through us.