

The Solemnity of Pentecost: He Remains Through The Spirit

My favorite verse in scripture is Matthew 28:20. It comes as the final instruction to the disciples immediately before the Lord's Ascension into heaven. After telling them to go and make disciples of all nations, these eleven men, who had never left the immediate area of Palestine, probably never been outside of Galilee except Judea and Jerusalem, these men were told to go to all nations and then were assured by the Lord, "Know that I am with you always until the end of time."

Tradition has it that Thomas wandered East through modern Iran and Afghanistan and as far as Karola, India. But Thomas did not go alone. He had received the Holy Spirit. He went with the Lord. It is said that Peter traveled throughout Northern Turkey and then all the way to Britain before eventually ending up in Rome. Peter had received the Holy Spirit. He traveled with the Lord. Andrew, it is said, traveled to the Scythians, the ancient ancestors of the Scots. Andrew had received the Holy Spirit. He traveled with the Lord. James Alphaeus, the second James on the list, went as far as Spain and then to Britain and Ireland. James had received the Holy Spirit. He traveled with the Lord. Simon the Zealot brought his fire to Egypt, Cyrene, now Libya, and the rest of Northern Africa. Simon had received the Holy Spirit. He traveled with the Lord. Jude traveled immediately east of the Holy Land. Philip went to Scythia, the region around the Black and Caspian Seas, Matthew went to Parthia, modern day Iran, and then as far as the west of India. Bartholomew went to Turkey, Matthias went to modern day Romania, and John may have traveled to France and also Britain, although he most probably was arrested in Ephesus, where he had cared for Mary the Lord's mother and our mother. He was saved from death miraculously and eventually died peacefully in Turkey. He and the other apostles had received the Holy Spirit and traveled with the Lord.

A miraculous event resulting in a miraculous change took place that first Pentecost Sunday. Eleven Disciples who had experienced the Risen Lord but who still stayed behind a barred door in that Upper Room, felt the wind upon them and saw tongues of fire over each of them. They no longer feared what would happen to them if they were to proclaim the Gospel. They heard what the Lord mandated. They were to go, preach and baptize. They spoke to the crowds that first Pentecost. People heard their message, even those who did not speak Aramaic, the language that Jesus and the people of the area spoke. The Word of God would not be constrained by language. And so they went throughout the world proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. And because they had received the Holy Spirit, the Lord went with them.

It is so important for us to realize that we also have received the Holy Spirit at our confirmation. Our confirmation was our personal Pentecost just as our baptism was our personal Easter. Because we have received His Spirit, the Lord is with us, wherever we go, whatever we do. And so we travel from one section of the country to another, or from one country to another. We might be visiting, like on summer vacation, or we might be staying permanently, like the Polish members of our family, or the Filipino and Asian members of our family. We may retire here, or move here for

work. Wherever we go, no matter how long we stay, we are given the mandate to make disciples of all nations and we are given the assurance that we are not alone. Because we have received the Holy Spirit, the Lord is with us.

My original love for the final message of Matthew was due to the feelings that I and everyone has that somehow, no matter how crowded our lives may be, we feel alone. But when feelings of loneliness come to me, I just say, "I am not alone. He is with me." I am sure that many of you here have experienced times that you feel alone, even when you are in a crowd. You might be a child in primary school, or a teen or young adult in high school or college, and have a feeling that it is just you against the world. But it is not. You and I have received the Holy Spirit. We are not alone. Jesus is with us. I can remember that trip I took some 46 years ago, a long drive from New Jersey to Tarpon Springs. I did not know one single person in the Diocese of St. Petersburg that I was going to serve. But I knew that I would not be alone.

It is the same for all of us. Life is full of change, full of new adventures. Even if you move from one townhouse to another on the other side of town, there will be new neighbors, and a new condo association, always an adventure. But you are not alone. More than that, none of us are alone. We bring with us the One who told us to go and make disciples of all the world. Maybe it takes nothing more than saying you will be at the block party or beach party after Sunday Mass. You are still letting the Spirit of the Lord speak to others, others who might someday say, "We need God in our lives." Or maybe you might invite someone who asks about your faith to join you at Mass, or at Life Teen or a campus ministry event, or, even better, to join you at an OCIA Inquiry meeting, one that you go to with the friend and even, perhaps, become the friend's sponsor. You go with the Lord. And he or she goes, not just with you, but with the Lord who is guiding them through you. And then there are those you meet who say that they used to be Catholic, and really still are, but they have not been to Church in years. You don't just tell them about "Comeback Catholics," or some such group welcoming people back into the faith. You join them. And they go with you and with the Lord to the meeting.

It is so easy for us to make the huge mistake of viewing the faith in purely historical terms. It is easy for us to view the events of Salvation History, as nothing more than history. Our personal celebrations of the birth of the Lord, Christmas, His Passion Death and Resurrection, Easter, the Ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost, can become reflections on the past but not celebrations that we allow to have a personal impact on our lives.

But, truthfully, most of us, and most Catholics do not do this. We look to each celebration, each season, as an opportunity to continue to mature as Catholics, to become stronger in our faith, to grow closer to God. The Church gives us Advent and Lent to prepare for the celebrations of Christmas and Easter, but our growth does not stop on Christmas Day or Easter Sunday, or Pentecost. We celebrate these seasons not just with the joy of the past, but with the joy of our present. God has become one of us, He has saved us through His Son's sacrifice of obedience and love, and He

remains with us as we carry on the mandate of Pentecost to make disciples of all nations.

None of us have completed the mission the Lord has entrusted to us. Even if we retire, it is only from work, but never from the service of the Lord. So, young or not so young, today and everyday is Pentecost. We all go forward to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. And we go with the Lord, for the gift of Pentecost is ultimately that Jesus' Spirit will be with us always.