

CRIBB<S>NOTE – MAY 23, 2010

This is Pentecost! Fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, members of the early church community experienced the fulfillment of God's promise that the Holy Spirit would come and live among them as the Source of Peace and Comfort. Pentecost occurred ten days following the disciples' unimaginable witnessing of Jesus' Ascension into the heavens. Pentecost is celebrated this week as the birthday of the Christian Church.

Something extraordinary and unexpected happened on Pentecost. A group of frightened people found courage to leave their hiding place. Although they had spent almost two weeks pent up together, too afraid to go outside, they suddenly stepped into the streets and started speaking various languages. They walked into the morning sunlight of the city and proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was Pentecost.

We need Pentecost today. Regardless of your faith tradition or non-religious conviction, all of us could benefit from a powerful Force that motivates us to form community amid our diversity. That was the exact result of the Pentecost encounter in Jerusalem more than two millennia ago. People just like many of us who feared difference, change, and international contact found themselves captivated by a transformative event.

What does Pentecost look like today?

A few years ago I went to Saint Sabina Catholic Church on the South Side of Chicago and worshipped on Pentecost Sunday. Saint Sabina is a predominately African American parish served by Father Michael Pflieger, a white priest who is a disciple of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Father Mike grew up in Cicero, Illinois, a Westside suburb of Chicago. He was at his home on September 4, 1966, when Dr. King was assaulted by white residents who were hostile toward African Americans and opposed civil rights. Father Mike says he watched his neighbors turn mean, ugly and nasty as they spewed racial slurs at Dr. King. It was a day Father Mike can never forget. It changed his life.

When I visited him at Saint Sabina on that Pentecost Sunday time collapsed and removed the distance between those early followers of Jesus Christ and the Church now. Father Mike led his congregation in worship and instructed everyone in the sanctuary to open our mouths and speak our prayers. I felt something stir within me for the first time. Words began to formulate in my mind and rolled off my tongue, "I want to be faithful and obedient to you, O God." I repeated the sentence again and again. It was a simple prayer with a Pentecostal effect. It changed my life.

The most remarkable occurrence during that first Pentecost was the people's ability to speak foreign languages. The followers of Jesus were provincial and not very sophisticated. But, when they were filled with the Holy Spirit they became urbane and multi-lingual. They spoke fluently to persons from other nations. They were no longer afraid or intimidated.

On our streets today we see and hear Arabic, Armenian, Cantonese, Dutch, English, Farsi, French, German, Hebrew, Korean, Japanese, Mandarin, Portuguese, Punjab, Sign Language, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Taiwanese, Vietnamese and a host of dialects and other global tongues.

Some of us are afraid of men and women who speak languages we do not understand. We fear they will threaten our way of life; change everything that is familiar to us. We believe everyone around us should talk the same way as we do. At least we think they should speak our language. But, what is our language to them if we do not take time to learn their languages?

Who sets the standard of how we speak in a society as diverse and pluralistic as where we live?

Pentecost gives us a chance to pause, reflect, listen, imagine, and become the other person. Pentecost inspires us to realize God's intention is for us to live in community. Pentecost places everybody together in a safe environment where our integrity and authenticity are recognized, affirmed, and valued. Pentecost means we do not have to be afraid of each other because of our differences. Pentecost allows us to see ourselves in relationship to each other so we can celebrate our gifts and share them generously.

Pentecost changes everything as the Holy Spirit comes, breathes new life, and blesses us as we go outside without fear; without apology; and without shame. We need a Pentecostal experience today.