

Pentecost Sunday (19 May 2024)

“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. [And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.]

+In the Name...

Earlier this week there was a mighty rushing wind inside of our beautiful parish church. Well, maybe it was more of a flutter... As most of you know, when the weather is warm, I leave open as many doors and windows as I can get open (which is not very many) during services. After Evening Prayer one evening, I left open the doors and windows while I prayed, hoping to help alleviate the warm temperature in the nave. Something caught my eye in the shadows above the high altar (the only lights on in the church were in the Lady Chapel) and I figured a cloud or

something had blocked the sunlight momentarily coming through one of the stained glass windows. I did not think anything of it, until it started moving again: and then it started swooping from one side of the clerestory to the other and then back again. Yes, you guessed it: a bird had gotten into the church building! Many things went through my mind, not the least of which was, “How the heck am I going to lure him out of here?!” I had not seen him come in, but it would not have mattered anyhow. None of the stained-glass windows open, and he was staying up in the rafters, hardly coming below the bottom of the clerestory windows. (Had he arrived a year ago, I would have asked him if he could change light bulbs!) I immediately texted the sexton, the junior warden, a priest friend, and my wife, who has served time as both a sexton and a junior warden. (For the record, her advice was the least helpful: she suggested one of the ladies wear a hat with feathers in it today. The bird would nest in the sweet familiarity of his kin,

falling asleep by the time Mass was over, and then leave when the hat left the building.)

Fortunately, the current sexton suggested I turn out all the lights inside, and hope that the bird would be attracted to the light outside. He was, but the sunlight through the stained-glass windows. At one point I went into the Marshall Street sacristy. When I turned around, he was standing in the doorway, looking right at me. I suspect had we met outside he never would have gotten so close, but in his desperation to be free of his prison, any help would be appreciated. "You're almost there," I told him. He flew up to the counter and landed below the window. The windows swing in from the bottom, so he still had to get around the window. "You're so close!" I encouraged him. Then I realized that I could go out the door and close it behind me, figuring that if he was locked in that sacristy, he would eventually find his way out. Hours later I went back, finding no sign of our former inmate.

Somewhere, I began to see the irony in this nearly-humorous situation. (Humorous if you are not the bird trapped inside a building, or the Rector who thought he was going to be cleaning bird excrement out of the recently-tuned organ pipes!) Today the Church celebrates the Feast of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost came down upon the Apostles and Our Lady. We heard about the tongues of fire, but frequently the Holy Ghost is depicted in art as a dove. I am no ornithologist, but this was no dove. He had some blue on him, but a cursory look at the internet did not reveal to me what he was. The Gospel tells us that after Jesus' baptism, the Holy Ghost came down from Heaven, like a dove.

Aside from the irony of a bird flying into the church building so near the feast day celebrating the Holy Ghost, I noticed other similarities between our own lives and that of our bird friend. Many of us first came into the Church unwillingly, or perhaps I should phrase it "unknowingly". We were baptized as infants at the request of our parents and godparents, which resulted in a

lifetime membership in an organization we joined without knowing anything about! True, we can become inactive or lapsed members, but when we are baptized, our soul is indelibly marked. I cannot leave the Church any more than I can leave the human race in order to become a cat or a rhinoceros.

As we grow older, we try to find our way through life, but often stubbornly believing that we know the best way. We pray “Thy will be done”, but then quickly follow it up with, “But God, in case you have not yet made up your mind, here is how *I* think you should handle this situation.” We think we see the light, but like our bird friend, it might be only a part of the brilliance. He flew to the Mother Theresa window, and then to St. Francis, trying in vain to get to his goal.

The Church helps direct us to the Light. Notice I did not say “to light”, but to “the Light”. Today is the birthday of the Church. (I should make us all wear pointed party hats at coffee hour!) The Church is the deposit of the Truth. It is fashionable now to say

that the Church was created by humans. No, the Church was established by Christ and it is run by humans. Christ knew all the apostles, the first bishops, would die eventually, so there had to be a way to preserve His teachings for future generations. Had Christ distributed His Truth in various and sundry places, there would have been confusion and consternation trying to reconcile the various pieces.

The Church provides the route to the Light, Christ in Heaven. As our bord friend discovered, it might not always be the most direct route or the route we would have chosen, but God will get us there. And when we look back, the circuitousness of the route might be due more to our stubbornness than to God's divine plan.

The question is often asked, "Well, do we need the Church?" That is, "do we have to have Her?" The Holy Scriptures are pretty explicit in telling us not to judge, so the correct answer is that we do not know. We cannot say for certain where the Holy Ghost is

not, but we know for certain where He is. And because of that, we know that the Holy Scriptures and the Sacraments are here to help us. The Church provides the original GPS system of how to get to Heaven. I would liken trying to get through this life without the Church to Swiss Family Robinson: sure, if you are marooned on an island, given enough time, you could create a shelter, and likely a darned good one at that. But now think of how much easier it would be to build that dwelling if there had been a hardware store on one side of the island and a lumber yard on the other! The Robinson Family had no choice. Neither really did our bird friend. But we do! Why should we unnecessarily and willingly handicap ourselves?

May we, like our fine-feathered guest this week, never stop seeking the True Light. But may we allow ourselves the aid of the Holy Ghost, and the use of the tools so richly provided by Holy Mother Church, in that life-long quest.

+In the Name...