

The fact I am about to share with you may or may not surprise you but this week end we celebrate one of the big three solemnities of the liturgical year. Pentecost is a celebration that should rank right up there with Christmas and Easter. It often doesn't because our secular world has not attached to it a practice like buying gifts or dyeing eggs. You don't hear people counting down how many shopping days there are until Pentecost. Trace this celebration back to the days of the early church and the importance of this solemnity grows in its importance.

St. Augustine, a bishop who lived from 354 until 430 wrote this about Pentecost: "It was a happy day in which the Holy Church makes her first radiant appearance to the eyes of faith and sets the hearts of believers on fire. Keep this day with joy, celebrate it in freedom of spirit, for in you is fulfilled what was foreshadowed in the days when the Holy Spirit came."

Pope Leo the Great, who lived from 400 until 461, concurred when he wrote: “The reverence due Pentecost is beyond all question, because this day is consecrated by the most sublime and wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit. And so, ever since that day, the clarion call of the gospel has rung out; Since Pentecost a rain of charisms, a river of blessings has watered every desert and dry land, for the Spirit of God has swept over the waters to renew the face of the earth and a blaze of new light has shone out to dispel our former darkness.”

Actually Pentecost is the birthday of our church, an organization which for over 2000 years has survived sharp attacks from the secular world and divisions from within its own ranks. With the Holy Spirit guiding the way, unity has come out of the diversity and understanding and mutual acceptance has come out of confusion. But remember that the work of the Spirit did not end at the original celebration of Pentecost.

St. Paul makes it clear in his letter to the Corinthians that the Holy Spirit is still creating unity from diversity. To make his point he uses the image of the human body. The body adequately stresses the contributions of the individual parts and the entire system that these parts create. For the body to function, all of its parts must remain unified; When a part is separated, it loses its purpose and the body suffers too.

It is like the ritual seen in the film March of the Penguins. When temperatures reach eighty degrees below zero and the wind exceeds 100 miles per hour, the penguins huddle together as tight as possible to form one compact body to survive. They regularly take turns standing on the outer perimeter so that no one will suffer and die. Individually they could not survive the storm but collectively they are saved.

So it is with the Body of Christ. Responsibilities are shared by all. On Pentecost the Holy Spirit did not inspire just a few hearts, the spirit inflamed all of the believers and sent them forth to fire up the earth. When Christ gifts us with the spirit in Baptism and

Confirmation it is our responsibility to share that energy with others, enriching our entire community.

Today, we mark the end of the Easter season and we are encouraged to take the power that comes from the resurrection of Christ and instill it deep within our being. Prompted by the Holy Spirit we become the hands, the eyes and the feet of Christ in our world. It is an identity that we renew every time we come to this altar and enter into communion with Christ and all the other members of His Body here on earth.

Today Lord send out your spirit and renew the face of the earth.