

Homily for the Feast of Pentecost

May 30-31, 2020

Readings: Acts 2: 1-11; 1 Corinthians 12: 3B-7, 12-13; John 20: 19-23

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I find it infectiously appealing when Pentecost falls during May, because May is dedicated to Mary—and Mary and the Holy Spirit are integral to our lives in Christ.

This year, in particular, as we are “in pandemic isolation,” it’s insightful to examine the connectedness in this enduring relationship.

When we look at the lovely statues of Mary in our churches or we recall images of Our Lady of Guadeloupe or Fatima or Lourdes, Mary is always pictured as young, beautiful, dressed in blue, sometimes holding Jesus, sometimes as the woman in the Book of Revelation (12.1), with a crown of stars and a serpent under her feet.

But we have few, if any, statues of the Mary of Pentecost—the older Mary who probably had strands of gray in her hair, her face showing the character that only long years of living bring, a face etched with pain or laugh lines. A face that was a bit more leathery without recourse to Oil of Olay.

Mary was about 50 at Pentecost—give or take a few years. Fifty would have been old in her time and culture.

Early in her life, Mary was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. Then, again at Pentecost, Mary and the Holy Spirit met again. She, who had said yes at the Annunciation, said yes again at Pentecost in this new time called the Church.

As we celebrate Pentecost today in this pandemic year, what can Mary tell us of our own life with the Holy Spirit? Here are three thoughts:

Throughout our life, we are invited to say yes to the Spirit of God.

- When we are young, untried and daring;
- When, like Mary, we have grown older with new dreams coming as a surprise;
- When we've had many opportunities to ponder life's mysteries, experience great joy and watch our world, our hopes and expectations change or crumble or leave us behind;
- When life seems fragile and threatened as it does this year.

As Mary mingled her own breath with the Breath of God, we are invited to do likewise.

In the Hebrew Scripture, the Holy Spirit is called the ruah Yahweh or the ruah Elohim—phrases which mean breath of God. I suspect that Mary and Joseph did not take breathing classes before Jesus' birth. But in our day, couples do just that and learn that how the expectant mother breathes gives unexpected strength for the birthing process.

We, too, can use breathing exercises in the various ways we bring life forth. We breathe deeply to control anger, to deal with fear, to clear our minds so that they are open to God and inspiration, to garner new energy to meet the challenges of the day.

Stop for a few moments now and concentrate on your breathing. Take long slow breaths.

Breathe out stale air.

Breathe in fresh air.

Breathe out misery.

Breathe in a welcome for life.

Breathe out the world's pain.

Breathe in mercy and goodness.

Breathe out listlessness.

Breathe in energy.

Breathing in this way is a form of prayer, not limited to professional religious people. Any of us can pray with our breath as we are stuck in traffic, awoken from sleep, are about to do a difficult thing, or experience life-altering moments.

The Holy Breath of God is in Mary, in you, in me.

Finally, as with Mary, the Holy Spirit, who came as wind on Pentecost, propels us where we would rather not go.

I can't help believing that, as a young woman, Mary was like you and me, expecting life to unfold gently, easily, predictably in Nazareth, one nourishing event after another.

But the wind of God took Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth and Jerusalem. They were refugees, uprooted like trees in a storm, homeless. They knew loss, political oppression and poverty.

The wind of God is not always a gentle breeze. Not in Mary's life or your life or mine. Yet, we hear no words of resistance from Mary as she stood beneath the cross of her Son on Calvary, even though her own heart was broken.

What will we do as the ruah Yahwh /ruah Elohim—the wind that is God—sweeps through our life? Will we believe that we will come through the storm? This pandemic storm, in particular?

Today, and hopefully, every day, we will say with Mary

Come, Holy Spirit.

Fill us.

Open us.

Breathe us free.

Blow through us.

Be God in us.