

Pentecost Reflection 2020 – Communion Liturgy

The Pentecost Scripture readings for today, beautifully proclaimed in different languages, are filled with images, some of which are not easily understood. They offer images of breath, new life, transforming fire and wind....not gentle winds, but strong driving winds that shake the rafters and astound the assembled community.

As I look around, I see a predominance of the color red throughout our chapel. Look around. What symbols or images attract your attention? What is it that we are actually celebrating today?

I think, Billy, a second grader from St. Joseph in Braddock has something very important to share with us about Pentecost and what it is that we celebrate, and who the Spirit is for us. STORY “A big bird is with us today.”

Each of us might be happy or excited that it is Pentecost, but our feeble efforts to explain “why and how” may also escape us.

The Old Testament Hebrew word “ruah” and the New Testament Greek word “pneuma” bear the basic meaning of wind or breath, but are often translated as “holy spirit”. In the Hebrew Bible and Jewish writings, they refer specifically to the spirit of Yahweh.

Walter Bruggeman, a noted scripture scholar, says: The Bible struggles to find adequate vocabulary to speak about and name our experiences of spirit. No words seem to be able to portray how ‘ruah’ surges into our history to liberate, heal, remake, and effect transformation.

We are left with the code term “ruah” to speak about what we know but cannot verbally express.

WE have no adequate vocabulary to portray the unutterable, irresistible, undomesticated force that “ruah” symbolizes and effects.

What we come to read in our translations of the Bible as “Spirit”, “Wind” or “Breath” are translated from one word, “ruah”.

In the Old Testament, Ruah is the wind that parted the waters and created the dry land. It is the very breath that God breathed into humans in our creation. It was this spirit that parted the seas and allowed the people to escape from slavery in Egypt. It is the same spirit that Jesus claims when he reminds us in John: “The Father and I are one. I am in the Father and the Father is in me and if you embody the love I come to share, you are in me and in the Father, and we are in you.”

What a powerful image “ruah” offers us to remember as Sisters of Divine Providence as we live out the experiences of community on this Pentecost, 2020. In the midst of our experienced diminishment in community membership, in ministry availabilities, finance concerns, poverty in our contemporary Church reality, and in our sinful and non-loving political reality in the United States of America, we still experience strong winds that beckon us and energize us to believe in the power of “ruah”.... of our Provident God.

The darkest paths of Mother Marie’s day as well as those of our present historical experiences are shaped by the insecurities, fears and the powerlessness of the winds that rage around us. The winds of the COVID 19 pandemic call us to remember that regardless of what we are experiencing, “ruah” is active throughout each of our personal and communal sacred stories.

Pentecost tells a beautiful story about God’s power and the transformation of those who had gathered in community. Did the early disciples receive the Spirit just on that one day, we call Pentecost? No, they were immersed in Spirit again and again. The Book of Acts records at least seven times that the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit. And this doesn’t count all the other times that never made it into the Bible.

Ruah is with us today in our personal and communal lives with blustery winds and fire, capable of transforming us to be about the work of the Kingdom. We are being challenged as never before to believe in God's promise of the Spirit. No generational diminishment or social or political ills can impede the transforming power of God's spirit with us since the creation of the world.

If we find ourselves tottering on the edge of the desperation of powerlessness, may we be gifted to allow the experience to explode into new hope.

Let us love with the spirit and energy of ruah! Let all our fears, pain, and past and present hurts and anxieties be shaken loose so we are freer to be the visible presence of Jesus pulsating with His Spirit. Let our transformed beings shake the rafters of our personal, communal and world realities! No words are necessary to explain how "ruah" surges into our history to liberate, heal, remake, and transform.

No vocabulary is necessary to say how this unutterable, irresistible, undomesticated force of "ruah" continues to impact God's design for humankind and for each of us as Sisters of Divine Providence.

Enjoy the day! Clothe yourselves with red or any color you choose to give expression to your dreams and new hopes for transformation. Remember what Billy said "A Big Bird is with us" A generous, fruitful, provident transforming spirit lives within each of us. What a grace-filled community we are!

Look around ! The big bird has breathed into each of us! We are Pentecost – filled sisters of Divine Providence, Can you sense it? Let's live this reality!

Sisters, the big bird is here. Can you sense it? Live in that hope!

Story (From page 1)

What adds a special flavor to this story is that Billy Escher was the nephew of our Novice Mistress, Sister Mary Florence.

Being 18 years old and filled with enthusiasm for preparing for the feast of Pentecost, I tried to share as best I could what Pentecost was. I told them that because this was such a big feast for the Church, the Birthday of the Church, we would all form a procession next Sunday and carry a picture of the Holy Ghost around the classroom and sing a special song. I tried to explain that the Church uses symbols to help us get into the spirit of certain feasts. There were the symbols of fire and a dove for Pentecost. When I had finished my inadequate explanation, I said, "But of course you know that the Holy Ghost is not a dove nor fire. These are just symbols we use to help us understand what Pentecost celebrates.

Well next Sunday was Pentecost, and as I prepared for our procession celebration, I asked them if anybody remembered what we talked about last Sunday. Billy was extremely excited and waved and begged to share. Yes, Billy... "A big bird is coming today" and we are going to celebrate and walk in procession with that big bird".