

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost, but what is it exactly we are celebrating? Typically you will hear it is the birthday of the Church, and while that is true there is much more to it than that. The first reading starts with the words, "When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled." The ancient Jews celebrated Pentecost 50 days after Passover, what did they celebrate and what does it mean to us?

For the ancient Jews Pentecost had two meanings. They offered the first fruits of the spring grain harvest to God in a special sacrifice at the Temple. And so we celebrate the arrival of the Holy Spirit as the first fruit of the harvest of the New Covenant. The New Covenant in Christ gives us a new, redeemed life of grace. This life begins here on earth but it will be fulfilled only at the full harvest, which will take place at the End of Days.

But the second meaning of Pentecost for the ancient Jews was the commemoration of God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Fifty days after the Israelites had miraculously escaped from Egypt, God sent them the Law, a guide for how they should live. They were no longer slaves to Pharaoh, now they were free and needed guidance in governing themselves.

And so in that sense, it was entirely appropriate that God sent to His Church the Holy Spirit on the Solemnity of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is the bond of unity between the Father and the Son. And the Law of the New Covenant, the Law of the Church, is unity. Unity is implied in two of the four marks of the Church, it is one, and it is Catholic, that is, it is universal. Saint Paul tells us that the Church is a body with many parts, but it remains one, united body.

Do you remember the story of the Tower of Babel? Because man no longer trusted God, because he wanted to be like God, he tried to build a structure that would make him equal to God. And what happened? Because God was not part of that structure, it fell, our language was confused and we were scattered to the furthest shores.

Today we see another part of God's plan for us unveiled. Today at Pentecost, God gives us the Holy Spirit so that we may begin to bring the human race back together. Before He ascended to the Father Jesus gave His disciples two directives. "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature," and to "Baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In doing so we enlarge the family of God.

That is our mission, to reunite the human family that has been torn apart by sin. That's why as soon as the risen Christ breathes on His Apostles; He instructs them to forgive sins. The Holy Spirit gave the apostles gifts that would allow them to teach the world. Whether they were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Greeks, Romans, Arabs or Egyptians, each heard the apostles speak in his own language. Each heard the Word of God in a language he knew by heart. And Tradition tells us the Apostles spread the Good News to the entire world. We will not find many written records of their travels but we will find other evidence.

When Portuguese missionaries arrived in India around the year 1500, they were surprised to find a thriving Christian community. Tradition tells us that Saint Thomas, whom you know as "Doubting Thomas," preached the Gospel to India in the first century. Do not underestimate the power of one faithful Christian.

About three hundred years after Saint Thomas a young slave girl was brought to the ancient pagan kingdom of Georgia, just south of Russia. Her name was Nino. She was a Christian. She was a model, hard-working servant, and she impressed everyone who knew her by her joyful character, her chastity and her piety. When asked about her faith she would simply reply, "I worship Christ as God."

One day a mother brought her sick baby to the young Christian, asking how to treat him. Nino took the child in her arms, wrapped him in her mantle, and called on the name of the Lord. When she returned the boy to his mother, he was in perfect health. The Queen of Georgia, who was suffering from a mysterious,

debilitating illness, heard rumors of the miracle, and sent for Nino to come to the palace and cure her. Nino refused to come.

So the Queen was forced to make a great act of humility and faith, she went to this young, virgin, slave. And she was cured. The Queen told her husband, the King, and soon after, during a hunting expedition that threatened his life, he too was saved by invoking the name of Jesus.

The King and Queen publicly declared their intention to become Christian. They were instructed by Saint Nino and sent for a bishop and priests from Constantinople as they began construction of Georgia's first Christian Church.

Wherever there is a Christian there is hope, because God Himself is present. That is what Pentecost is all about.

So what does that mean to us here today sitting in this Church? My brothers and sisters, there is still work to be done. When the King of Georgia converted to Christianity, the Kingdom of Georgia by definition also converted. But that doesn't mean that every inhabitant of the kingdom suddenly became Christian. Along with the bishop and the priest came missionaries. And it was the work of the missionaries to spread the Word to the rest of the kingdom.

And that is where we come in. Make no mistake, our contemporary society is mission territory. Although the vineyard now reaches to the furthest shores, it still needs to be tended. And the workers in the vineyard all have their different roles. Some harvest the grapes; others turn the grapes to wine. Some clear new land for growth, others plant new seed.

The Holy Spirit gives us all unique gifts. There are many different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are many forms of service but the same Lord. Each one of us is given a gift, or a combination of gifts, to allow us to fulfill our mission of reuniting humanity. Each of us has a unique role that no one else can fill. We are given gifts that allow us to speak to others in a language they know by heart. And if we refuse

these gifts, if we ignore them and refuse to take our part in God's great saving plan, how many will be lost that we were meant to save? We may have convinced ourselves that we lead good lives and obey God, but what will we say when we are called to account for the gifts that we have been given? What will we say to those souls who are denied eternal life because you or I didn't reach out to them?

Christians are not called to complain about their lot in life, their sufferings or their inconveniences. We are called to be conquerors, like Christ. We are called to conquer evil and darkness with the power of Christ's risen life. And the Holy Spirit has given us the weapons to do this, each in our own way.

So let us pray that with God's help we will recognize the gifts the Spirit has imparted to us. And let us pray for the inner strength to use those gifts, to find the work we were placed here for, and reach out to those people that only we can reach. And then, when we stand before the King of Kings and are called to account for our lives, we will not have to speak; our work will speak for us.