

I have seen the Holy Spirit work in many powerful ways, but, strangely enough, this is none of these stories came to mind when I was preparing for this homily. Instead, I was reminded of a time a time when I was shooting bottle rockets out into a field. I didn't know that the field was dry, and before long there was a wall of flame being fanned by the strong driving wind.

In today's readings, we are presented with these two images of wind and flame. In our Gospel, Jesus appeared to His disciples shortly before His Ascension while they were hiding in the Upper Room. He breathed on them saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Sometime after that, while they were gathered in that same Upper Room to celebrate the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, the room was filled with the sound of a strong driving wind and tongues of flame came upon them.

There was a true newness in this event, and at the same time it deepened something that God had already done in history. The Book of Genesis tells us that the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters as the world was created. Later, God formed mankind out of the dust of the ground and breathed into them the breath of life. Just as God once breathed the breath of life into man, Christ breathed into us His Spirit, giving us new life and making of us a new creation. Just as God once hovered over the face of the waters and created the world, the Spirit hovered over that Upper Room and gave birth to the Church. These two distinct life-giving actions of creation are always found together. The Spirit always gives us life and gifts so that we might come together in unity as one Church.

We desperately need the Spirit within us if we want to have life... if we want to live in unity with one another. We need the Spirit in our lives. This is such a simple message, but do we actually believe it and live it? Do we actually beg the Spirit to come into our lives, daily praying "Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love...", knowing that it is only the Spirit which gives us life and unity? Or do we instead place our faith and trust in the world,

believing that science gives us life... believing that wealth gives us meaning... believing that our governments give us peace? The truth is that we need the Spirit in our lives because only the Spirit of God can give our lives meaning and purpose.... only the Spirit of God can allow us to live in unity and peace.

We must beg the Spirit daily to fill us with His gifts. We can't wait to do this until we are desperate, like I do when I have to give a homily and have nothing to say. Instead, we need to pray to the Holy Spirit daily, begging Him to shower us with His gifts. Often, when we think of the gifts of the Spirit, we first think of the big flashy ones, ones like prophecy and tongues and healing. There is nothing wrong with asking for these gifts, but we must first ask for the most essential gifts; for knowledge and wisdom, understanding and right judgement, courage and reverence and fear of the Lord.

We need these gifts from the Spirit of Truth so that we can see the world for what it truly is, so that we can have true knowledge and use it wisely. We need these gifts so that we can fall ever deeper in love with our God out of awe and reverence for what He has done in our lives, and live courageously and wisely for Him. If we let Him, the Holy Spirit will fill us with His gifts and set our hearts on fire. This fire will give our lives purpose and meaning, and we will then desire to share this fire with others.

When the Spirit came upon those few disciples in the Upper Room, their hearts were set on fire and they rushed out, preaching in words that those around them could understand. In the part of the Gospel which we didn't read today, we are told that those who heard the words of the disciples were cut to the heart, and they said, "Brothers, what must we do?" Peter told them, "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and then you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." And about three thousand souls were saved that day.

The world is just as desperate for the fire of the Holy Spirit as it was back then. It is easy to look around us and see how many people in this world are suffering, how many people in this world desperately need the power of God in their lives. The world lies to them, as it does to us, saying that they will be happy if they have more money, if they are more attractive, if they change their gender... the list of lies mount up, but in the end all of these lies prove to be false and leave those who believe them more empty than before.

We will know that the Holy Spirit has listened to our pleas and filled us with His gifts when we don't believe the lies that the world is selling us anymore. We will know that the Spirit is within us when our pain is lanced and we are filled with a peace that only God can give. We will know that the Holy Spirit is within us when our hearts are burning within us and our greatest desire in the world is to go out and share the love that we have received with others.

Just a few disciples, on fire with the Holy Spirit, were able to save three thousand souls. Just think about it. If every single one of us left these doors today, on fire with the Holy Spirit, speaking the truth of God's love to the people around us, how many souls could we save? How many people would cry out for the gift of the Holy Spirit and be added to the Church?

When I was shooting bottle rockets into that dry field, I could never have burned down that field as I did if the wind hadn't been fanning those flames. This world in which we live is like a dry field ready to burn, desiring new life. While individually, we cannot do this on our own, when we all go forth together in the power of the Spirit, speaking words of truth, the whole world will be set ablaze with the fire of the Spirit.

“Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth.”