

St Pius & St Anthony Homily Pentecost Sunday Year A1

With Pentecost, the holy Spirit rains down as fire upon the gathered apostles, and motivates them to go share the good news of the Kingdom of God on earth. It is remarkable how the church grows and multiplies. Of course, it is the work of the holy Spirit! A little later in the same chapter as our first reading today from Acts 2, in verse 41 we hear that as a result of the experience of this Holy Spirit, “about three thousand persons were added that day.” Then a little later in Acts 4:4, we hear that “about five thousand” join in this apostolic company of the Church (*for more similar statements of this incredible growth, see Acts 2:47; 5:14; 6:7; 11:21, 24; 21:20*). When I hear about such tremendous outward growth and spread I try to think of picture examples of what this must have been like, and I’d say the Church begins its spread like a rushing wildfire, (of course, a Holy Spirit **good** wildfire). The apostles had practiced missions before, as we heard in Luke chapter 8 about the Twelve being sent out, and then in Chapter 10 of Luke about a further 72 disciples sent out, but those were more localized missions maybe only out 20 miles or so before returning. Yet now the wind of the Holy Spirit has caught up their enthused flame of faith and fanned it to spread ever further outward to all the known world. This fire image fits well as they spread in all directions now. The last words Jesus spoke right before ascending to heaven in the first chapter of Acts (1:8), Jesus had said, “you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses **in Jerusalem (first)**, throughout **Judea (2nd)** and **Samaria (3rd)**, and **(then)** to the ends of the earth”. *In Jerusalem, through Judea, Samaria and to ends of earth*. If we looked at these names on a bible map, that is a detailed description of an ever-increasing outward-bound growth in all directions – starting from ground zero city Jerusalem, to Judea, then Samaria, then to all the world, like for us from neighborhood to district to city, to county, to state, to country, to hemisphere, then to all the globe. At that point, the Fire of Holy Spirit would be overspread the entire region and pushing its outer boundaries successively to take in everything in its path (maybe also like lava pouring out from a volcano center in all directions – laying a new rock foundation of Christianity everywhere. So. Pentecost embodies that missionary charge of Jesus (just as in Matthew 28:19 too, “Go, therefore, (Jesus said) and make disciples of **all nations**, baptizing and teaching them all I have given you.’ I hear Jesus saying there, ‘Baptize or flood the zone with the fire of the Holy Spirit - and

the zone that He intends is everywhere! The gospel of Jesus is meant to be shared and spread, always gaining wider coverage, and further ground to grow in. Last week on Ascension Sunday, I mentioned that it was necessary for Jesus to ascend so that He could then 'in Spirit' be equally present to all of his followers **everywhere** simultaneously. And we can see that need of His ascending, even more today as we see His church grow outward from the provincial little spot of origin in Jerusalem to branch out the world over. I am so struck that all of the scriptural images of the Holy Spirit we heard about today of rushing wind, fire, the shaking buildings, and ground moving beneath one's feet, along with a new(*Spirit*) language clearly understood by everyone. All of those symbols shout to me, 'Go, grow, sow & spread God's grace). They're all signs of life-movement everywhere! Whatever it takes to get the message out!

When I think of how the Spirit gets out to everywhere, growing the church so rapidly and plants Christ communities all over the place, (& it being Memorial Day weekend-vacation camp days), I remember when I was a kid, my family with several other families, we would always vacation together for a week over at the the Lakes. Specifically, we always got adjoining campground spots at Lake energy. This is in the day of maybe a pop-up camper, but mostly we all stayed in tents! But we established a little settlement for a week every year. Part of getting ready was packing: coolers, groceries, clothes, camp equipment, fishing gear and especially we always brought our own live bait (so everything would be with us at the site-and we wouldn't have to leave). We went to our local neighborhood tackle store and picked up our coolers of minnows, worms, night crawlers (oh and something else but that other is the core of this story-more in a minute). As we were packing multiple trips back and forth into house, my younger brother had already been placed in the back seat of car, (I guess we had packed him in too). And on one of the trips out all of a sudden my dad is performing a rescue on my brother retrieving him from the car, with him excitedly calling 'Dad, Dad , they are everywhere and on me.' Well, as he was waiting, he must have thought it a good idea to check if they were alive, & shake the round paper cardboard canister (with screens) of bait crickets. Maybe the shaking knocked top off or he may have taken it off to get one (but like potato chips you can't get just one) and before he could contain the spread, crickets were everywhere, all over him, all over back seat up in the window, jumping up onto the front dash.... Everywhere! Well, I think of the

spread of the early faith of the disciples in the same way – once opened by the working of the Holy Spirit, the gospel and the kingdom moves out dispersing everywhere all over (just as Jesus intended it to). (It was funny that on the ride home a week later (and for weeks at night) we could still hear crickets chirp from somewhere in the car).

But the gift of the Holy Spirit today, similarly poured out upon us, calls us to be on mission, to move, go, grow, share and pass forward the grace that God has blessed us with-Life in Christ! Jesus' commission in Matthew 28:19 is for us to "Go, baptize all nations, teaching them all I have given", so we are called to flood everyone with Jesus' goodness, cover them with kindness in His name, and teach, if asked we give as the reason for our extraordinary helpfulness & service, as the fact that Jesus has done it for us and called us to do the same for others. He said in our gospel, 'As Father sent me, So I send you' (John 20:21). Do for others what God has done for us. And I trust that such missionary goodness will naturally spread and overtake everywhere to the glory of Christ and His Kingdom.