

Empowerment

a sermon preached on the

Day of Pentecost

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at

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Lecton: Acts 2:1-21; 1 Cor. 12: 3b-13; John 20:19-23

The Holy Spirit is God breathing into the World. Whether in our personal lives, or in our ecclesial lives, or in the world or creation itself, the Holy Spirit is the breakthrough of God in our midst. God may break into our lives in rather dramatic ways or in very ordinary ways. However, word and sacrament acknowledge this breaking into our midst on the part of God.

Where the word is proclaimed, the bread broken, or the cup shared, there is God once again in our midst, in tangible, visible and audible form. The formlessness has taken on form to conform to our hearing, seeing, touch, smell or taste, so that we might know who God is as the **"one who is in us"**. **Our God is one who as Spirit is intimately present.**

Prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles were virtually hiding in the upper room. A great task had been entrusted to them, yet they had neither the strength nor the will to begin it, but after the coming of the Holy Spirit they were changed people. They left their hiding place and set out courageously to preach the Gospel.

In promising the Spirit, Jesus said to them (as recorded) in Acts 1 – "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem, but to the ends of the earth".

Power was precisely what they needed, as up to this time they were crippled with fear and a sense of inadequacy. They felt totally incapable of carrying out the task of preaching the Gospel. They needed someone to empower them. Empowerment is one of the "in" words today. We have seen individuals and groups of people who initially felt powerless to change their situation, suddenly become able to do so when someone empowered them.

In the first place, empowerment means to give or delegate authority to someone - to authorise someone. In the second place, it means to give ability to, or enable someone to do something, and in this sense it certainly applied to the Apostles at Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit empowered the Apostles at Pentecost, by coming down on them in the form of wind and fire. Wind has the power to move – to uproot. Fire has the power to refine and transform. The power they symbolise here is the power of God; the presence and action of God.

The coming of the Spirit provided the Apostles with the energy, the momentum, the enthusiasm, the courage, the love and passion to get on with the task Christ had given them. The Holy Spirit would help them but wouldn't do it for them. There is a lot of truth in the saying - "God helps them who help themselves".

However, we must not think that change in the Apostles came in an instant. Change is a gradual growth process, and growth can be slow and painful. We do not easily let go of old ways, habits and attitudes. People begin to change when they are given hope, when someone believes in them and trusts them by giving them a task to do – when someone takes an interest in them. Above all, they come out of their shells and hidden energies are released in them.

We need someone to empower us so that we are able to take charge of our lives, and live them responsibly. This means being willing to change what needs to be changed. We especially need empowerment in order to witness to our Christian Faith. The power that changed the Apostles is also available to us.

Therefore, let us pray that we will be receptive of the Holy Spirit, which is your gift to us O God, to heal us, to strengthen us, to enlighten us, to help us to believe, to give us hope, and to teach us compassion and love, without which we are nothing. Amen.

Reference: John 20: 19-23

Acts 1:8

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