



CNI

Pentecost - a celebration of diversity

There's no better time to celebrate the diversity of the Kingdom of God than on the Day of Pentecost. Separately, our differences are too diverse to list, but put together, our individual uniqueness creates a beautiful kaleidoscope we call the Body of Christ.

Sadly, today we see people and nations torn apart by racism, religious chauvinism, man-made borders and cultural bigotry. We have become a culture of us-versus-them, where the "other" is to be feared and never trusted. This is not a new occurrence, but one would have hoped that humanity would have learned from its past mistakes and recurrent genocides over the ages; however, here we are in the 21st century, repeating history again with chilling efficiency and cruelty.

Pentecost is a reminder that God's Holy Spirit is given freely to all people with no respect for race, culture, socioeconomic standing, gender or

any other distinguishing mark used by people to differentiate one person from another. In God we are one.

On the Day of Pentecost, reported in the Book of Acts, people gathered in Jerusalem from all corners of the Roman Empire. They represented competing economic interests, diverse cultures, a myriad of languages and different religious traditions. Nevertheless, God's grace was given freely to all who heard the message preached by St. Peter, and thousands converted to Christ. These aliens who converged on Jerusalem returned to their homes and spread the message of Christ, and the church began to spread like a wildfire engulfing dry brush.

From its inception, the church was a diverse group of people who hailed from a variety of cultures and languages. It was in the midst of this great diversity that God sent the Holy Spirit upon his church and started a movement that would change the history of the world forever.

The message of Christ hasn't changed, but those who claim to be his followers have often failed miserably in living up to that message. The greatest temptation facing Christians isn't necessarily losing their passion, but rather, losing sight of the fact that in Christ there is

neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female. In God's kingdom there are no illegal aliens or undocumented workers. We who have died with Christ in baptism are resurrected to be a new people bound in love and service to one another.

The Holy Spirit is given freely, without respect for citizenship or socio-economic class, and God continues today to pour out his Spirit on all humanity.

Jesus promised his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit whose fruits are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control. These fruits are the qualities of Jesus that the Holy Spirit develops in our lives as we grow in our faith. That's who we are and who we are to become as Christians. The Holy Spirit transforms the believer into the image of Christ and obliges the Christian to share in the Church's apostolic and missionary activity. Just as the disciples' bold and fearless witness at Pentecost led to the conversion of more than 3,000 people, so too are we called to bear witness of God's love for the world today. This love is freely given to all humanity.

The Holy Spirit compels us to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves. One way we do this is by reaching out

to the unloved, the hard to love, and the rejected in our midst and loving them, emulating our Heavenly Father's love for us who are called by His name.

Every time we who are baptized into the Body of Christ approach the Eucharistic table, we are reminded of God's love for us. It is around the holy table gathered with our brothers and sisters in Christ that our Heavenly Father graciously accepts us as living members of his own Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, and feeds us with spiritual food in the blessed Sacrament.

Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we welcome new believers into the blessed family we call the Body of Christ. As they pass through the waters of baptism we are asked to do all in our power to support them in their life in Christ. All of us have an important role to play in their spiritual development. It is no small thing what we do around the baptismal font, since all of us take solemn vows for which God will hold us accountable.

Just as the Holy Spirit was poured out on peoples of every language at Pentecost, so the Holy Spirit today continues to draw people from every culture, language and ethnicity into the family we call the church catholic. Pentecost is

an awe-inspiring day of joy and celebration on many levels. Through the Holy Spirit, we welcome strangers into our midst and become family, and we welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives and become transformed into the image of Christ.

May the gift of the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost renew us today and stir up within us those spiritual gifts which God has so richly and freely given to us when we were baptized into Christ's holy church.