

Pentecost

June 5, 2022

St. Patrick

We heard from the Acts of the Apostles that first Pentecost: **“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability.”**

Especially these days, folks are speaking languages which, even when they are the same, we don't really hear. We really don't *hear* one another.

It was my first assignment as a priest, some 47 years ago. The Bishop sent me to St. Paul Parish in Whitehaven—a large parish with a flourishing school. Things started out very well, except for one thing. The principal of the school. She was a Nashville Dominican sister, in her 70s. It was ten years after the Second Vatican Council, and Sister Mary Carmel didn't like *any* of the changes. If there was a “guitar Mass,” well...she would walk out of it.

Sister Mary Carmel sized me up quickly. Newly ordained, I was put right away in the liberal camp in her mind. She didn't want to have anything to do with me.

It didn't take long, and the feeling on my part was mutual: I didn't want to have anything to do with Sister Mary Carmel. When I went over to the school, and we saw each other...well, there was that curt pleasantry, “Hello, Father,” and my reply, “Hello, Sister.” Nothing more. It was a cold war.

I rarely presided at the early morning 6:00 a.m. Mass. A few times, I did. After about a year, I arrived early for that first Mass of the day, and knelt at the side altar railing, praying quietly. About thirty parishioners were praying silently. Then, from the side door, about fifteen Dominican sisters entered the church for Mass, Sister Mary Carmel among them. Walking to her pew, she said, loud enough for everyone to hear, “Well, if it isn't Singing Sam!”

Yes, a cold war.

Well into my second year at St. Paul's, Sister Mary Carmel had a heart attack. She was hospitalized several days, and then spent months in the convent, trying to recover. Guess who the crusty pastor appointed to bring Holy Communion to Sister Mary Carmel every day at the convent?

Every day I brought Holy Communion to Sister. We had nothing in common, we thought. Slowly, it happened to us. We spoke a different language, and saw the church from different lens, but I came to see her deep love for Jesus as I brought her Communion. We didn't plan it, nor really want it. Over time, however, there was a closeness which began to grow. The Holy Spirit was at work.

The bottom line: Sister Mary Carmel and I became the closest friends—fifty years age difference, and different ways of seeing the church. It was our Pentecost moment, and we learned—very slowly—to speak to one another the same language of Jesus' love.

She died in her sleep in June 1980. I was far away in graduate school then. The day before she died, she mailed a note to me.

I experienced Pentecost in that relationship with Sister Mary Carmel. It was the gift of the Holy Spirit, and—it came to me later—also through the Body of Christ in the Eucharist which I shared with Sister Mary Carmel each morning, just the two of us.

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Any “cold war” going on in your life? Are you and someone else, or others, speaking a different language, and no one is trying to listen? Within this parish, or elsewhere, feathers get ruffled, and you're not speaking to each other, perhaps for decades.

St. Patrick's: *Come, Holy Spirit!* It's Pentecost. As we sang in the Sequence, **“Heal our wounds, our strength renew...Bend the stubborn heart and will.”** May the Risen Jesus keep breathing on us, that we learn the language of love. Indeed, *Come, Holy Spirit!*

General Intercessions

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Enkindle in us, your church, the varied gifts of the Holy Spirit, that we might truly speak and live Jesus' language of love; we pray to you, O Lord—

Fulfill our hope for an end to the pandemic, and prosper efforts to care for the earth; we pray to you, O Lord—

End the horrific gun violence in our city and throughout our nation: make us instruments of your peace; we pray to you, O Lord—

Help us to live the resurrection of Jesus and stand in solidarity with the poor, the outcast, and those suffering from racism and bigotry; we pray to you, O Lord—

Welcome all who have died into the light of your everlasting presence, especially all who have died from violence and from the war in Ukraine; and, Wayne Winterburn, on the 19th anniversary of his death; we pray to you, O Lord—

(for the 11:00 a.m. Mass only--)

Fill with your blessings those in our midst who celebrate this week their 50th wedding anniversary, especially Dorothy and Joe Weems, and Margaret and Jim Callicott; we pray to you, O Lord—

