Homily for Pentecost 2016  
May 15, 2016  
Readings: AA 2:1-11, Ps. 104, 1 Cor. 12:3-13, Sequence, Jn. 20:19-23  
Places: St. Bernard’s & Stella Niagara  
Theme: Prayer to the Holy Spirit  
Mood: Humble and hopeful  

Pentecost Sunday! This church’s decorations, many church members’ clothing and the priest’s vestments glow in the color red symbolizing the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost completes the continuum of Jesus’ salvific actions: his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension and sending the Holy Spirit. The Spirit now resides in the Church.

Jesus explicitly refers to the Spirit almost a dozen times. He introduces his ministry by declaring in the synagogue, “the spirit of the lord is upon me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor.” (Lk. 4.16) In his ministry he explains, “I cast out devils by the Spirit of God. (Mt. 12.28) He instructs his followers that they “must be born again by water and the spirit.” (Jn. 3:5) And that he must return to the Father so as to send the Spirit of truth, the Paraclete. (Jn 14:17, Jn. 15:26; 16:13) St. Paul explicitly names the Spirit 75 times. The remaining books of the New Testament make the total count well over a hundred references to the Holy Spirit.

As a student of Church History, I want to emphasize that the Spirit was sent to the Church on Pentecost, and continues to operate through the Church. The Spirit guided the Church in choosing the collection of books to be included or excluded from the Bible in the late third century. The Holy Spirit inspired the Church as the primordial sacrament, in deciding the number of sacraments beginning in the first century up to the 11th century. And the Spirit guides the church through every successive generation’s inevitable turmoils. Personally, when I feel upset by the confusion that reigns in our times in society and in the Church, I remind myself of various previous tumultuous eras in Church History. I recall with a smile the situation in the 14th century when the church had a series of two parallel lines of popes, one Italian and another French for seventy years. Priests at that time, when praying the Eucharistic Prayer, in which the priest mentions the pope by name, would add, “whichever one it is.” The Spirit has guided the Church for two
thousand years, even though we Church-people have been slow to listen and even slower to respond to the Holy Spirit.

Today, it is good for us Christians worldwide to ponder that virtually all Protestant churches join with the universal Catholic Church in praying that the Holy Spirit “will renew the face of the earth.” Ponder how powerful that is. We are not alone; we two billion people, i.e., one-third of the world’s population, praying that the Holy Spirit will reinvigorate us Christians, renew us, restore us to be the Church people that Jesus intended us to be.

An ancient prayer of the Church expresses well our faith-filled desires. The prayer proclaims, “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth.” People my age will recognize this prayer and now hymn-chant as the “Veni, Sancte Spiritus.” Let’s reflect on each phrase.

2. “Fill the hearts of your faithful.” ... Different cultures use different metaphors to describe the center of one's being: heart, soul, spirit. All these metaphors signify the depth of one's center point, one's heart of hearts. From this depth we yearn for God's presence.
3. “Kindle in them the fire of your love.” ... Fire flashes, sparks, roars. Fire exemplifies passion, power, love. God is love. We pray that the Spirit would fill us with God's love. Love gives origin to our life through god's creative and our parents' co-creative love making.
4. “Send forth your spirit and we shall be created.” ... This is our Catholic and scriptural “being born again!” We are born again when we receive the sacrament of baptism, that presence and power of divine life.
5. “And you shall renew the face of the earth.” ... It is the Spirit acting through us that initiates and produces the good that we do. We do our best, and entrust our lives to God. This is why all that we do ought to begin and end with a prayer.

And a wonderful prayer to repeat everyday and especially this day, is, “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth.”