

06/08/14 Pentecost, 2014

-- We hear about it so often these days. Members of Congress can't agree to anything. Often they won't even talk to each other. They simply put out their set agenda and refuse to listen to different opinions.

-- Sometimes, the same complaints are raised in the Church. Different groups refuse to speak to each other. They draw up their battle lines: are you for or against the Leadership Conference of Women Religious? Do you support or oppose allowing married priests? It's all too easy to talk past each other rather than dialogue.

-- All this may remind us of the story of the Tower of Babel. Some people started a huge project, but their language was confused. No longer could they understand one another.

-- One of the effects of the Holy Spirit in the account of Pentecost was to reverse the effects of Babel. People of different nations and languages understood the people who had received gift of the Spirit. They were on the same page...their message was communicated, and many accepted.

-- The Holy Spirit we focus upon at Pentecost is not some mysterious force that suddenly overtakes people. It's not a gift for the few. It is God's life in all of his people.

-- Sure, in Acts it's described like a blowing wind and tongues of fire which came upon Jesus' followers. It has some extraordinary effects upon some of the people it touches. But flashy pyrotechnics are not the principle gifts of the Spirit.

-- St. Paul reminds us that there are many gifts of the Spirit. And the more spectacular ones (e.g., tongues) are not necessarily the greatest. Each person has some gifts of the Spirit, and these should be used for the good of the community as a whole.

-- The feast of Pentecost is an opportunity to recognize the gifts of the Spirit present in our own community. Since, in 2014, Pentecost is the same weekend as Relay for Life, it's been a chance for me to see that spirit at work in so many parishioners working in various ways to fight against cancer, through our own group and others in the county.

-- It's also a time to encourage each other to use our gifts to build up Christ's body. Our new Pastoral Council members will begin their work this coming week, and we pray for them. We also pray that our upcoming Stewardship Fair in early September may bear fruit for our parish life.

-- In all of this, we are called to work together, not in competition with each other or by engaging in one-upmanship. We may not think alike on all issues, but we share a common faith, which is the most important thing we share.

-- Let's take some time this week to think of what gifts God has given us. How can we use them, to build up our family, our community our parish?

-- As we conclude the Easter season and move into the summer months, many of us look forward to vacations and at least some time for relaxation with family and friends.

-- That is well and good. We all need that renewal. But we don't take a vacation from God, and God certainly doesn't take a vacation from us. Even as we take time for leisure, God asks us to use our spiritual gifts to help others around us.

-- The only winds we may experience this summer may come from the thunderstorms which inevitably crop up from time to time. But God's spirit will still be present, even if in very ordinary ways.

-- May we not miss the power of the Spirit present in us and in God's Church.