

Today's reading from Acts is certainly where we find all the action. The scene opens on the disciples, after the Ascension, but still gathered away in the safety of the Upper Room. We have been told that have been to the Synagogue and have been praising and blessing God and yet today we find them hidden away. Suddenly with great force a wind enters into the room accompanied by flames shaped like tongues of fire that rest over each disciple's head. And then with an equal fury they are propelled out of that Upper Room and out into the crowds whose response to them is a best mixed. For example they are astounded that these men from Galilee are suddenly able to speak in a variety of different languages, while others write off their rather exuberant behavior to too much new wine. However one looks at it, this is a big event in the life of the Church. While it does not have the secular traditions of Christmas or the shouting of Alleluias of Easter, Pentecost is an equally important major feast day in our liturgical year. Just as it is the discovery of the empty tomb on Easter that affirms our beliefs and celebration of Christmas, it is Pentecost, the declaration, creation and spreading of the Church to engage in God's mission that emphasizes the enormity and importance of Easter. Today we celebrate the Holy Chaos that is the beginning of the Church herself. Yet if we only look at the events found in today's reading of Acts, if we only concentrate on the wind and the fire and the speaking in new and strange languages we will miss the more significant and enduring occurrences which accompanied that Holy Chaos.

And to do that we need to turn today's Gospel from John which takes us back before the Ascension of last week, before the days of Jesus appearing to His disciples after His resurrection, before the resurrection itself to Holy Week.

Today's reading is part of a very long and sometimes rambling discourse that Jesus gives to the gathered disciples on fateful that last night. Soon He will be arrested, tried and handed over to death on the cross, and while Jesus knows this, the disciples do not. They have no idea what is to come next, all they know at this point is the conversation is not going the way they expected it go, Jesus is talking about leaving them and they are not only saddened but unprepared as well. In the conversation they have been told that they are to love one another, that they will be known as His disciples and by their love, they have been told that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends, they have been told that friend is how Jesus refers to them now and most importantly that the good news of God's love for the world is theirs to spread throughout the world, that Jerusalem is only the beginning. But how these things are to be accomplished, and what is to happen when they are challenged by a world that does not comprehend the good news of God's gift and the message that they as the chosen disciples are to carry "to the ends of the earth," is at best unclear. And truth be told, it can remain somewhat unclear for us as well. What they are told at the beginning of today's reading is that Jesus is sending an advocate, a Spirit of truth. Looking at many translations and interpretations of today's reading gives us several different images of just who or what Jesus is sending to the disciples and us as well. Today's NRSV uses the word Advocate, but other translations use the word Comforter or Companion or Agitator or Friend, all of which give a very different message. All of which makes this very unclear. So back to the original Greek we go! The original Greek word parakletos or in today's speech paraclete and is most closely translated into "one called alongside." Really any of those words agitator, comforter, companion, friend could fit into the definition of one called alongside. Which still doesn't make things clear

and maybe that is the point. While the Holy Spirit that is found in Acts with rushing wind and tongues of fire could easily be identified as an agitator and there are times when we too as the Church in present need that sort of presence in our lives, it is also true that we may need a different sort of one called alongside in other situations.

Reflecting on a Mother's Day conversation with my son, in his last year of college gave me some insight into the difficulty of how to translate *parakletos*. My son called to wish me a happy Mother's Day and told me that he had come to realize something interesting, "You loved my sister and I in different ways over our growing up, always knowing what it was that we needed at the time and yet the strength of that love never changed and you always loved us both equally." I remember thinking at the time what a beautiful thing to hear and of course we would pay for law school! But I think that the realization that Jesus has sent the Paraclete to us, to be for and give us what it is that we need in any given moment or situation. Furthermore that the presence of the Paraclete means that we although Jesus is no longer with us, through the Spirit He is in us.

There are times in our lives as Christians when we need the Holy Spirit to be an agitator among us. The times when we feel Her pushing us into new and uncharted territory, the territory where we have never done that before, the territory we really think we don't want to enter. There are times when She is pushing us out the doors of the Church and into the world in a holy chaotic state of sorts. Those are the times when it truly seems the wisest thing to do is for us to go where She is pushing or sometimes to simply get out of Her way! Then there are the times when we are challenged by the world that surrounds us, when we struggle in our efforts to engage in the mission, when we are held back by the doubt and

uncertainty that lives within us. Those are times when the Spirit comes to us as an advocate, one who gives us in a legal sense the testimony and in a practical sense the tools we need to carry on with the mission. There are times when we are weary, or sad or overwhelmed and then the one called alongside becomes our comforter, a safe and secure place to rest and refresh in order to begin again. And then there are times when we are steady, engaged in the mission and energized by the outcome and in those times the Paraclete becomes our companion.

Our life as Christians, our community as the Church is a complicated endeavor. To give the Holy Spirit only one adjective to describe Her presence among us could be referred to as putting Her into a box. And something tells me that is not a good or wise place in which to put Her! The good news of today's Gospel is that just as Jesus told the disciples on that last evening together, that although He would be leaving them shortly, He was sending to them a powerful presence to remain with them and in them always. The scene from Acts was only the beginning. We as the Christians all these many centuries later are the beneficiaries of that presence within us as well.

Today we celebrate Pentecost which in the words of priest and poet Malcolm Guittes:

**Today we feel the wind beneath our wings
Today the hidden fountain flows and plays
Today the church draws breath at last and sings
As every flame becomes a Tongue of praise.
Today the Gospel crosses every boarder**

All tongues are loosened by the Prince of Peace
Today the lost are found in His translation.
Whose mother-tongue is Love, in every nation.

Love that we have been freely given, love that we give to one another, love in the presence of a multi-faceted Holy Spirit that dwells within us to tend our every need so that we are assured that we are never alone.