

The Birth of the Church

The Feast of Pentecost is traditionally known as the birth of the Church. It ushered in an era of unity in diversity, when every person who gathered to hear the preaching of the Apostles, were hearing them in their own native tongue (Act. 2:8) which was a cause of celebration and an incentive to live as a community of love, breaking the bread together and praying. The event of Pentecost is contrasted to the tower of Babel, where they could no longer understand as speaking multiple languages was a cause for confusion and misunderstandings. The Pentecost Vigil reading says, “That is why it is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the speech of all the world. It was from that place that he scattered them all over the earth (Gen. 11:8-9). Before his Ascension, Jesus commissions his disciples saying, “Go to all nations and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15). A mission to gather back the scattered to make them one flock under one shepherd (John 10:16).

Jesus’ commissioning of his disciples and us by the virtue of our Baptism, is to draw all people to him. It is time for us to ask ourselves, “How do I fair in fulfilling my commissioning to witness the Gospel and bring about unity of faith and hearts?” The Church’s mission did not change from the time of Jesus, to preach the Good News and make disciples. Some have narrow and strict interpretation of the making disciples, “proselytizing or joining our denomination.” However, Jesus did not have such narrow interpretation because his primary aim was for each of us to have a changed and converted heart will shine on others to witness our good deeds as a cause to glorify the Lord (Matt. 5:16). Are we a cause for God’s glory or stumbling stone for others? We have to assess ourselves against the trend of our time, when people are politically and religiously polarized. We need to be in tune with the real meaning of the birth of the Church, sharing the Good News of making God all and in all.

The power of the Holy Spirit brings about true change of heart and mind, but we have to be receptive to such possibilities. When the disciples were discouraged, afraid and confused about their future, the Holy Spirit changes them into fearless preachers of the Gospel. By the standard of the time, they were illiterate and backward Galileans, but the power of the Holy Spirit transformed them to be fierce witness of the Gospel. They inspired people of every status to follow Jesus, the Christ. For more than two centuries, the Christians were scorned as midcore intellectuals. They were not known for their philosophical, intellectual or oratory skills, yet their conviction, lifestyle and love for one another was worth following.

Again, let us look at our current situation, especially, the state of Black Catholic Church. In The Pew Research's recent survey, Black youth and young adults are leaving Catholic Church at alarming rate, 69%, the highest of any denomination. White youth and young adults are also giving their back to the Catholic Church at 59%, the next highest rate of departure from the Church. Though there are many factors causing such an exodus, but the Catholic Church, from its local parish to its highest institution structure should be alarmed by these trends. The US is still considered more religious than Europe, but such comparison is relative. As we celebrate the birth of the Church on this Pentecost Sunday, we have to ask, "Is the Church relevant to our youth and young adults? What is turning them off for such an exodus?" Unfortunately, there is a trend of trying to recover "Middle Age devotional spirituality" as an antidote for such cynicism. The Church always looked forward though she treasured and valued its traditions and Tradition. God is reminding us in the readings from Prophet Joel, "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions; even upon the servants and the handmaids, in those days, I will pour out my spirit." (3:1). Let us trust the Holy Spirit to "make a way out no way."

Happy Birthday Church

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