

Pentecost

Acts 2:1-11

Ps 104

1 Cor 12:3-7,12-13

Jn 20:19-23

Today is the “Feast of More”! Pentecost is the celebration of the fact that we are now, all of us, more than we could ever have hoped to be. We are now, all of us, called to be more than we ever dreamed possible. We are now, this day, all of us, given the grace of God to become more than this narrow world and our sinful lives can contain.

Of course, there are two kinds of “more”: The “more” that God makes possible, and the “more” of pride and the earthly goods we covet, the self-centered “more” we claim for our own satisfaction alone. Our Scripture readings depict the difference. We all know the story from Genesis of the Tower of Babel, and the ancient human longing for self-glory: “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky, and so make a name for ourselves...” The men and women of Shinar do not seek to use their gifts to build a temple to the LORD, they are not building a hospital or a school or a library, that God might be praised, the sick might be healed, the young might be taught, or the gift of wisdom might be shared. They are building a tower to their own glory, that other peoples and nations might look upon it and exclaim, “More wonderful than any other is this tower! More blessed than any other is this people!” And the Lord puts an end to their presumption, scattering them, dividing them, making them less than what they were.

But today, God puts an end to that. Today, God begins to unify the human race. He does this by establishing His Church. And He establishes His Church by the gift of the Spirit, the gift of the divine “more.” Who are these men upon whom the Spirit descends? At the beginning of the Easter season, we heard about them cowering behind locked doors, terrified that the fate which met Jesus might also come to them. Throughout the Gospels, we hear of them as weak, ambitious, vengeful, lazy, cowardly, and vain. But the Spirit makes them more. The Holy Spirit gives them the power to become more than fearful, more than sinful, more than what even they themselves thought they could be. Now, they speak in more than just one language, and all can understand and hear the Gospel. Now, they act for more than just their own good, risking persecution and prison that the Good News of Jesus Christ might be heard, received, and bear fruit. Now, on Pentecost, the apostles begin to live for more than the apostles, think of more than themselves, value more than themselves. They serve something more, something beyond them, something that calls for a sacrifice and a dedication beyond personal preference and comfort and safety. The Spirit comes to them, the Spirit brings the gift of more, and that is not a gift which simply lets the apostles be all that they can be: It makes them more than they ever thought they could be, more than what their parents thought they would be, more than what their childhood friends and aunts and uncles and the people of their villages ever imagined they could be. Today, children and churches are named for these men. Today, they are commemorated with feast days and honored with statues and processions. Who could have seen that coming? Truly, these weak and sinful apostles are the first guests at the Feast of More!

Like the apostles, “we were all given to drink of one Spirit.” And that Spirit is always about

more: doing more, believing more, saying more than ever seemed possible. That is how we know we have received the Spirit, that is how we experience the Spirit in our daily lives. On any day we find ourselves being more patient with a sick relative than we were the day before, there is the Spirit alive in our hearts. On any afternoon we find ourselves being more generous to the poor than we were that morning, there is the Spirit alive in our hearts. At any hour we find ourselves struggling to turn away from gossip, lust, greed and ignorance, there is the Spirit alive in our hearts. At any moment we find ourselves being more forgiving than we thought possible, whenever we have felt the killing weight of anger slide from off of our hearts, then does the Spirit of adoption flow in our veins, then “the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

Is such forgiveness possible? Does the Spirit really move in our hearts, bringing refreshment, peace, consolation, and forgiveness? Are these no more than pretty words, hopelessly naive, utterly out of touch with the iron realities of life in what is called the “real world”? In answer to these questions, I think of my first assignment as a parish priest. In the church, on the door of the reconciliation room, there was a poster, and at the bottom there was a listing of the times for confessions. The poster itself was the picture of Pope John Paul II, meeting with the man who shot him. It’s a famous photo, perhaps you have seen it: The Pope is sitting, talking with the man who almost succeeded in killing him, offering his would-be assassin forgiveness. As I stood there, in the quiet, empty church, I was overcome with emotion, brought to tears at the thought of this good and holy man imitating Jesus Christ by forgiving his persecutor. The Pope forgave the man who tried to kill him. Me, I still hold a grudge against the first person who cut me off in traffic when I was learning to drive. I remember the license plate. Sometimes, I still look for that plate, anxious to have the chance to tell the driver a few things that have been on my mind for years! But this man forgave his assassin. There is the Spirit at work, moving a Christian beyond pain, giving him more love, more compassion, more forgiveness than most of us can imagine. There is the proof of Pentecost, the evidence that the Spirit moves in the Church.

In the Incarnation, a virgin’s womb brought forth more than a single life, but Life itself. Throughout his life, Jesus moved beyond the boundaries of custom and caution to care for the sick and the outcast. On Easter morning, Christ move out of his burial cloths and beyond the walls of his tomb. In today’s Gospel, Jesus moves beyond the barrier of the locked doors of the upper room. In the reading from Acts, the apostles move beyond the barriers of different languages and cultures, and beyond their own weakness and sin. In this Mass, the bread and wine become more than mere food and drink, more than the work of human hands: They become the body and blood of Christ. In our baptism, we all received the Holy Spirit that has made us more than a society for good works, more than a civic organization, more than a club, more than a fraternity. We are the body of Christ, and like the apostles, we are made more and we are made great not by our own accomplishments but by the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of the Holy Spirit which has been poured into our hearts.

Thus it is that everything about our faith cries out “More!” Jesus is more than just a man, the Church is more than just a club, this celebration is more than a mere meeting. This world is more than a place of pain, these bodies more than a means to an end, the good things of this earth more than tools for our pleasure. Tomorrow’s dawn is not just a sunrise, but an image of the coming of the Son of Man in glory! Every glass of water we drink is more than just water, but a reminder of our baptism, a reminder of the primal waters over which the Spirit moved at creation! This evening’s meal is more than just earthly food, but stands as an image of the eternal banquet of heaven, when we will eat and drink with Christ not to sustain our bodies but because it will be joy to eat and drink with Christ! The warmth of the sun, the laughter of a child, the love of husband and wife, the loyalty of friends, the

flavor of our food, the weight of a stone, the marvel of a airplane, the intricacy of our physical brains and the stunning depths of the minds they contain - these are what they are, and they are so much more. They are gifts from God, images of His love, hints and signs and great loud shouts that tell us we are loved by Love Himself. And so we can receive eternal life from this altar, because we know that the bread and wine is always more than it seems; we can care for the poor with joy, comfort the mourning with hope, teach those in darkness with conviction, and offer forgiveness to those who hurt us freely, because we know that the poor, the mourning, the lost, and the those who trespass against us are more than problems, inconveniences, duties, or enemies. They are tabernacles of the Holy Spirit, bearers of the image of God, brothers and sisters of Christ, marked with the sign of the Cross and destined for endless life with God. We can, we really can, forgive those who sin against us, because - thank God! - we sinners are always more than our sin.

This is our feast, the feast of the Church, the "Feast of More." We are, all of us here, always more than our sins, more than our failures, more than our wounds. And this is not from us, but from Christ Jesus. That is a message more remarkable than any other, a proclamation more wondrous than heart or mind has hoped for, a truth more beautiful than the purest spring day. This day, at this Mass, around this book and around this altar, we celebrate the Spirit, alive in our hearts, making us holy, making us chaste, making us generous, making us compassionate, making us forgiving, making us, now, at this very instant, before the last echo of these words has died away, more than we were just a moment ago.

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Church of Saint Francis
Fulton, Maryland