

Bishop Thomas Zinkula 2020 Pentecost Homily

In his Gospel, John tells us that after Jesus arose from the dead, he appeared to the disciples while they were hiding in fear behind locked doors. And he breathed the Holy Spirit on them.

In our present situation, we can relate to this description of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles. We too have been hiding in fear behind locked doors. In our case, we are afraid of the coronavirus. We have been in self-isolation just like the apostles.

John tells us that Jesus breathed on them — and that’s where he loses us! Oh my goodness! Was Jesus within six feet of them?! Was he wearing a mask?! At least he didn’t cough on them!

Ezekiel comes to our rescue. “I will open your graves and have you rise from them.” In our case, it is: “I will open your homes and have you depart from them.” Thankfully, things are beginning to open up a little bit. God speaks through Ezekiel: “I will put my spirit in you that you may live.” Slowly, cautiously, carefully, we are getting back to living our regular lives again as much as possible.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes, “All creation is groaning in labor pains.” What is the Spirit birthing in and through this time of pandemic? What is the Spirit trying to bring to life?

In a document written by Pope Paul VI 45 years ago, he talks about a new evangelization. He calls each of us to deepen our faith in God, believe in the Gospel message, and proclaim the Good News to others. Paul VI says we will get nowhere in our efforts to share the Good News of Jesus Christ without the Holy Spirit compelling/urging/pushing each of us to proclaim the Gospel. And without the Holy Spirit stirring the hearts of those whom God is calling to hear, understand and accept the word of salvation.

Things are very different in this time of pandemic. A lot of things have changed. A lot of things have slowed down or have been put on hold, including, unfortunately the Vision 20/20 Celebration that was scheduled to take place this summer. Will we ever get back to “normal”? We are afraid ... confused ... uncertain ... worried ... depressed.

Meanwhile life goes on. The Holy Spirit is still with us and within us. Vision 20/20: From Pentecost to Pentecost continues. The Holy Spirit is still stirring our hearts and the hearts of those who, maybe without even knowing it, are searching for the sacred.

This time of pandemic can be for us a new Pentecost. This is a moment for evangelization ... it is a moment of encounter ... a moment of dialogue ... of invitation ... of accompaniment ... of conversion.

We felt fairly safe, secure and comfortable a couple of months ago. How quickly everything has changed. The pandemic abruptly stripped away many of the things that have provided some sense of “meaning.” Things like work, school and various routines, as well as trivial and superficial things.

This strange new virus has broken through our defenses. It has awakened us from our dreams. Times of turmoil often bring about periods of religious awakening. People take ultimate questions more seriously than they had before. They contemplate the purpose of our existence. They look to a transcendent source for hope.

When a Danish economics professor looked at Google data from around the world, she discovered that searches for prayer have surged as the COVID-19 crisis has unfolded. She found that, interestingly, the search intensity for “prayer” doubles for every 80,000 new registered cases of COVID-19. We are at a crossroads. Let’s not waste this opportunity!

The French philosopher, Blaise Pascal, wrote, “All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone.” We have had a lot of alone time lately. The whole world has become a monastery. What is the Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts? Where is the Spirit leading us? Let’s listen and follow and share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

(Here is the link to the video of Bishop Zinkula’s homily for the Pentecost vigil, <https://youtu.be/3CHEYkaViQ>)