

**Homily by Fr. Ken Wolfe at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, Tucson, AZ
on the Vigil of the Solemnity of Pentecost, May 22, 2021**

From St. Paul's letter to the Church at Rome:

“Brothers and sisters: We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved.” (Romans 8:22-24a)

“Now wait a minute and just watch - let me show you,” was the advice the father gave to his son as they worked side by side building a small wooden bridge for the boy's toy cars. The boy was awkwardly trying to use the heavy hammer to drive a small nail into the edge of the board. A simple task for the father, but the boy couldn't balance the two pieces of wood, place the nail, and strike with the hammer at the same time. He was frustrated. 1

And so, the father's words: “Let me show you.” The father was trying to show the boy from his woodworking knowledge and experience, how things should work in the world of bridge building – small bridge that it was. The father possessed the big picture and was trying to reveal a few specific skills for the benefit of his son. Things would go better and far happier for the boy if he listened and received what his father offered him.

My friends, the revelation of truth in the business of miniature bridge building is akin to life in the Holy Spirit and the Christian Faith. Christianity is a revealed religion - knowable especially through relationships – and it was on powerful display on that first Pentecost. The mighty rushing wind filling the Upper Room, spilling out into the streets, the tongues of fire descending upon the apostles, hundreds of people coming together from many nations and hearing the scandalous yet amazing news of the Messiah's life, his crucifixion and resurrection. Hearing the strange yet marvelous news of salvation in their own distinct languages and dialects. Seeing the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son fulfilled in public for all to experience! What better evidence do we need that life in Christ and in His Church is a revealed truth. The rushing winds of Pentecost knock us off balance, the Gospel proclamation becomes sensible to our ears/minds and sets our hearts on fire with the Holy Spirit's message that salvation is a gift received by simple child-like belief in the Lord Jesus.

Biblical religion is not about our struggling up the impossible mountain to God, but in God coming down and seeking us out. Particularly in God coming to us in His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. But inevitably we find Jesus through relationships with others – through knowing, loving, and trusting relationships with our mothers, fathers, grandparents, and our brothers and sisters. The father helping his son to construct a little bridge can be the means for the son to experience knowledge, patience, a sense of joy and fulfillment. As they work together and over time the son draws closer to the father, and the father closer to the son. The son comes to love and trust the father. The son knows he is safe with the father.

A father and mother can open up a world of truth, goodness, beauty, and adventure to their child. And a daughter now grown can pass on that legacy of wonder at God's creation and hope in Christ Jesus to her children and through them - down through the generations. That is what a Catholic understanding of the domestic Church and the Body of Christ is all about. The important point is that, yes, children learn, but they do not teach themselves; they need to be taught by those who already know the Lord. There are many parents and grandparents who need to become children again so they may come to know Jesus and then be able to teach him to others.

As the son walks with his father to Mass, kneels and prays beside his mother, receives Jesus into his hand or onto his tongue as does his father, then the work of the Holy Spirit initiated in Baptism, strengthened in Confirmation, is grounded and deepened in relationship to others we love and respect. As the father speaks casually about the Lord to the son at the workbench or on the hiking trail – in this way, Christ becomes real to the son. As the father and the son go to Reconciliation the son learns that the father is not perfect and that they each need God's, and each other's, forgiveness. There is much to be learned in building small bridges together!

The Pentecostal work of the Holy Spirit may be powerful and dramatic but most often the Spirit works quietly and deliberating deep within us. In his second letter to his most trusted companion in the Apostolic ministry, Paul says to Timothy: "I recall your sincere faith that first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and that I am confident lives also in you." (Let's stop there. Did you hear it? Did you hear the intergenerational nature of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? The faith that Paul sees so sincerely at work in Timothy lived first in Timothy's grandmother Lois and in his mother Eunice!) Paul continues: "For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have by the imposition of my

hands. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control." (II Timothy 1: 5-7)

My friends, we need to "stir into flame" the gift of the Holy Spirit that we received through the imposition of sacramental hands in our baptism, in our confirmation, in our marriage, and in our ordination. The flames of Pentecost need to be stirred up within us!

That first Pentecost must have been quite a scene – quite a commotion. As my bishop, Steven Lopes, reminded me this week, that first Pentecost is an apt description of where the Church is today. The Covid pandemic has kept us locked away like in that Upper Room for long periods without the celebration of the Mass and the Sacraments, cut-off from other parish families and our own dear families. The situation is shifting now! The Mass and the Sacraments can be celebrated publicly again! Effective vaccines are readily available. It feels like the door of the Upper Room has been thrown wide open! Can we now create a scene?

We have received the same Holy Spirit that set the early Church on fire with the good news of the risen Jesus. Can we now go out and proclaim the risen Christ? Now is the time to invite family, friends and neighbors into the adventure and full communion of the risen Christ; to reinvigorate our Catholic Faith, and to the worship of God in the beauty of holiness.

The Church was born from a handful of persons, just as ordinary as you and I. Let us stir into flame the gift of God's grace. It is time to burst out of the Upper Room! 2

In the name of the One, True, and Living God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

1. The metaphor of a father and son working together being a revelatory event I heard in a sermon by the Rev. Jay C. May at The Church of the Advent, Boston.
2. Bishop Steven J. Lopes' Pentecost Message 2021, ordinariate.net.