

The Vigil of Pentecost
Deacon Pat Hall 2018

Homilies are aids to encounter the living Word.

First, please read the scripture passages that inform this homily.

EZEKIEL 37:1-14 (C), **ROMANS 8:22-27**; & **JOHN 7:37-39**

These readings can be found at:

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/052018-vigil.cfm>



We are here today for the Vigil of Pentecost. Many people today often call the Saturday evening Mass a vigil Mass, but that doesn't quite make the mark.

What we regularly celebrate on Saturday is an anticipatory Mass for the Sunday liturgy. We hear the same readings and preaching on Saturday evening as our fellow parishioners hear on Sunday morning. And our participation at the Saturday celebration satisfies our Sunday obligation. In pastoral service to the faithful, this option for worship was granted to us in the 1960's.

Centuries before this, though, the Church celebrated vigils on the evenings before great solemnities, including the Christmas vigil and of course the Mother of all Vigils on Holy Saturday before Easter. A vigil is a time of waiting and watching in wakefulness for some great event. These vigils have different readings than those of the solemnities they anticipate. The liturgy is constructed around the event of the evening—the watchful waiting and anticipation.

Tonight, our readings our preparing ourselves for tomorrow's celebration when we'll hear:

*suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind,
and it filled the entire house in which they were.
Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire,
which parted and came to rest on each one of them.
And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2)*

It is this sense of waiting, of impatience or yearning for the coming of the Holy Spirit that I encourage you in tonight. I encourage you to tomorrow to get your Bible and read the Book of Acts, Chapter 2, so that you can embrace what you are yearning for tonight.

Think of what you have yearned for in the past: an expected birth, the results of a medical test or an answer to a job application. Can you imagine what life would be without the action and presence of the Holy Spirit? Can you yearn for the indwelling of the Spirit for yourself?

Yesterday, I received a call from an old friend. He had been a student leader at the campus parish where I served. He and his wife (another of the campus leadership) were hoping that I would be available to baptize their infant next month. I said, "Get me some water; come Holy Spirit and let me at that baby."

Can you remember the rushing in of the Holy Spirit at baptisms you have witnessed... at the time of the pouring of the water? Remember that and yearn for more.

May our liturgy today help you with that yearning.

Today you heard from the prophet Ezekiel and his vision of the dry bones. The bones were scattered over the bleak fields. The Spirit joins those bones together, covers them with sinews, flesh and skin, and breathes life into the new creature so that Israel becomes a new people.

Actually, I chose this Ezekiel reading from four options given in the lectionary for the Old Testament reading. The others come from Genesis, Exodus and Joel.

I chose the dry bones reading because of its power of the Spirit to make us whole. Also, in no little part, because I could hum, *Those bones, them bones, them...dry bones.*

Usually, one is not given options in the lectionary for the Old Testament reading. The reason we have four options is connected back to the idea of the vigil being preparation for what is to occur the next day.

In ancient times, vigils were often carried through the entire night. You could expect to have some long liturgies, donchaknow.

Well, the reason we have the four options tonight, is because those four readings used to compose an extended vigil. You didn't hear one of the four; you heard all four, and then you had the New Testament reading and the Gospel.

Well, it would be unfair and maybe distracting if I proclaimed all of the six readings of the extended version. Maybe next year with preparation for conducting an extended vigil I will do so.

Still, in the spirit of preparation, may I sum them up a bit.

The Genesis involves the incident of the Tower of Babel. Due to pride and revolt against God, the one language of the human race was scrambled and thereafter no one understood anyone else.

In Exodus, the people of Israel are assured of being God's special possession, dearer to God than all other people. The Lord demonstrated so by coming down on Mt. Sinai amid thunder and trumpet blasts.

In Joel, we see that the Spirit will be poured out on all humanity amid wonders in the heavens and on earth.

In our Gospel, John speaks that from within the heart of Jesus' disciples, rivers of living water, that is, the Spirit, shall flow, once Jesus is glorified.

I save our letter to the Romans for last:

We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now.

With that sense of labor, in our groaning:

Come, Holy Spirit

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