

HOMILY ~ PENTECOST SUNDAY MAY 22/23, 2021

A number of years ago, Mother Theresa was interviewed and she was asked: "What is the biggest problem in the world today?" She answered without hesitation: "The biggest problem in the world today is that we draw the circle of our family too small." I think this is true and probably even more true today than when she said it. Due to COVID, I think we feel distant from people that we used to consider "like family." Over the past year, many things have become politicized; and our country has become sharply divided up into different groups that oppose one another. We tend to blame groups of people for the things we do not like that are going on in this country. I think the circle of our family that we draw has become smaller than ever.

Today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost or the coming of the Holy Spirit. As we hear in the First Reading, the first Christian Pentecost took place during the Jewish feast of the same name. The Jewish feast was first celebrated by the Jewish people as thanksgiving for the first fruits of the wheat harvest and was later associated with a remembrance of the Law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. This was a pilgrimage feast that meant that people from all over the world traveled to Jerusalem. This is no coincidence. The Holy Spirit brought people from all over the world together as one family; and even though they all spoke different languages, they understood one another. I think it is God's will that we all be filled with the same Holy Spirit and work together. We have seen when we all work together, we can accomplish great things. We hear in the Second Reading: "As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ, whether Jews of Greeks, slaves or free persons ..." With all of the divisions we have in our country, it is like trying to get things done without most of our body parts.

As things have become more and more political, we tend to have a very emotional reaction when we encounter someone that we do not agree with. I have noticed this in myself. We have a fight or flight response to them. If we respond to them in this way, we will either have a big fight or leave in a huff. The circle of our family gets smaller. When we feel this fight or flight response, we need to calm ourselves down and listen. Sometimes I just say: "I will have to

think about that” and remain calm. They are not evil people; they are just people with a different point of view than ours. Sometimes we scapegoat groups of people blaming them for what has gone wrong. The circle of our family gets smaller. We cannot define people by the group that we perceive they belong to. The group is not an evil group, and it is unfair to judge and condemn a whole group of people.

In the Gospel reading we hear: “I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth.” Certainly the teachings and example that Jesus gave us are true today, but there are all kinds of issues that exist today that simply were not issues 2,000 years ago in the Middle East. We could not bear them 2,000 years ago because we could not understand them. With the Holy Spirit, we can have the courage to face negative influences and live our lives according to the truth with love. We would like to get fireworks from the Holy Spirit, but that is not usually how he works. He usually does not overwhelm our free will. He works in more subtle ways that we have to discern through prayer. He wants us to choose the truth with love. He also wants us to work together in the same Spirit. Here at St. Edith, we have worked really hard over the years to draw our circle of family really big. As we now move out of the pandemic, we need to be very purposeful in expanding the circle of our family. That is God’s will for our community.

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim