

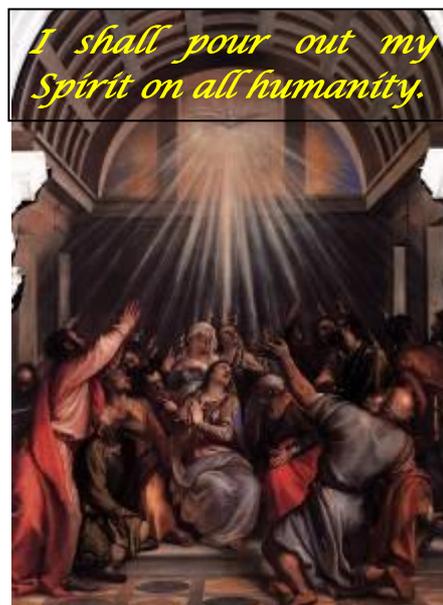
Pentecost

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Acts 2, 1-11

“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all I have said to you.”

John 14, 15-16, 23-26



Today's readings invite us to pause and reflect on the Christian community into which we were initiated when we were baptised. They also invite us to take time to ponder who it is who breathes life, love and energy into each of us individually and into the community we form together - a community which is bigger than all of its parts added together and a community, which, at its best, reflects to our world, the love and compassion of God. I want to suggest that the love and compassion to which I refer are seen at their best in the actions of very ordinary people like the first disciples, and in the ordinary people who live next door to us, who work beside us and you sit in the pews around us when we gather each week in our parish churches.

One of the finest people I have encountered over the years, and only through his writing, was the American columnist, poet and novelist, Brian Doyle (1956-2017). Born in New York, he went on to graduate in English Literature from Notre Dame University and eventually became the editor of *Portland*, the magazine of the University of Portland, Oregon. This university, like Notre Dame, is conducted by the Holy Cross Congregation of priests. Doyle wrote many pieces about Catholic customs, beliefs, practices and mysteries not just because he was a practicing Catholic himself, but because he described Catholicity in his own words as "illogical, unreasonable, unthinkable, unprovable, nonsensical, counter-cultural, and in direct defiance of all evidence and human history", to which he added: "Isn't that great?" (Prologue to his essay *Grace Notes*) Later, in a radio interview, he commented: "To grow up Catholic is to be especially lucky as an artist, because you are soaked in miracle and mystery and symbol and smoke and the confident assertion that every moment is pregnant with miracle and possibility and stuffed with holiness like a turducken." (Interview with Nick Ripatrazone)

What struck me as I reflected on the significance and meaning of Pentecost were his essay entitled *Leap*, in which he described some of the events associated with the destruction of the Twin Towers, New York on Sept 11, 2001, and a comment he wrote to a youngster in Korea in response to the boy's fan letter: "Stories are prayers of terrific power". When I think about it, I come to see so many of the stories of everyday life and those woven into the New and Old Testaments as Spirit-inspired "prayers of terrific power".

Leap is both an essay and a prayer (it is available free on the internet). Let me quote a little of it: "A couple leaped from the south tower, hand in hand. They reached for each other and their hands met and they jumped. Their hands reaching and joining are the most powerful prayer I can imagine, the most eloquent, the most graceful. It is everything that we are

capable of against horror and loss and death. It is what makes me believe that we are not craven fools and charlatans to believe in God, to believe that human beings have greatness and holiness within them like seeds that open only under great fires, to believe that some unimaginable essence of who we are persists past the dissolution of what we were, to believe against such evil, hourly evidence that love is why we are here.”

In the continuation of today’s first reading from *Acts*, Peter defended the other apostles from allegations that their speaking out was a result of their being drunk. He went on to quote the prophet Joel and to explain to the crowd that apostles’ words were inspired by God’s Spirit of love: “The Lord declares: *Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young people shall see visions, your old people dream dreams. Even on the slaves, men and women, shall I pour out my Spirit*” (see *Joel 3, 1-5*).

Peter painted Pentecost as another chapter in the story of God’s love for human kind. It is God’s love that inspires us to reach out to one another, to those we know and to those who are foreigners and strangers. The “miracle” of Pentecost shines a light on a motley community - women and men from the very first community that would come to be known as Christians, together with immigrants from “every nation under heaven”, who had come to live in Jerusalem. Here they were, listening to one another, understanding one another and reaching out to one another in acceptance, enabled and inspired to do so by the Holy Spirit. While we might not yet fully appreciate it, that’s a miracle of community-building that is possible for all of us to engage in, because, as Brian Doyle wrote: “love is why we are here.”

It’s the action of that same Spirit that has given us Pope Francis to set about the challenging work of rebuilding a Catholic Church that is faltering and broken. And the same Spirit who inspired Francis of Assisi in the 13th century to revitalise a Catholic community that had slipped into disarray and chaos. It was God’s Spirit who led Mother Teresa to reach out to the sick and destitute in the slums of Calcutta, and who even now prompts 15-year-old Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg to lead strikes by secondary school students to pressure politicians to take affirmative action against climate change. Protests by school students in the United States to control the sale of lethal weapons, and action by Australian students in support of asylum seekers and war refugees are expressions of Spirit-inspired action.

While Pentecost (*pente* is the Greek word for ‘fifty’) was originally a Jewish Spring festival celebrated fifty days after Passover, it has been adopted and reshaped by Christians because it was during this festival, when Jerusalem was crowded with people who had come to celebrate, that the first apostles were inspired by the Spirit to preach and to teach.

Pentecost urges me to ask myself: Am I so alive with the love of God made visible in Jesus to allow myself to be an instrument of God’s Spirit to reach out in welcome to everyone I encounter in the course of each day? Am I even conscious that God’s Spirit is at work within me every single day of my life? And if so, am I attuned to the Spirit’s promptings, and then, courageous enough to respond to them?