

Catch the Spirit

Some people are surprised that I like sports as much as I do. Not only do I love the actual game, but I am also obsessed with the atmosphere; this includes the crowds, music, cheers, food, and noise. If you've ever attended a game in person where they have alcohol sales (usually beer) the crowd tends to get a little louder and a bit more rowdy as the game progresses. Perhaps the alcohol consumed in the tailgate parties (in football) or at a nearby establishment (in the Fenway area) BEFORE the game may have something to do with this. Other people can get involved in a game as well, especially if it is a close one, without the "benefits" of alcohol.

The ever-real effects of alcohol, including the disease of alcoholism, have been a reality for literally thousands of years. We read about wine in many Scripture passages as it was the common drink of the day as drinkable water was scarce. It is no wonder that people thought the Apostles were drunk at the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Peter had to remind them, "It is nine o'clock in the morning; no one is drunk!" With that excuse gone, the exuberance of the Apostles had no other explanation but that they were filled with the Spirit. The ones who hid in the Upper Room following the death and resurrection were finally freed from the bonds that kept them from preaching the Good News of Jesus crucified and Christ risen from the dead. Much like Lazarus in the tomb, they needed to be unbound in order to get to work.

They had their chance to begin this preaching right away. Let's set the stage for what had happened. People were in what we would now call the town square as they always were. This is where women would gather to draw water from the common well. It is also where the town ovens were as people did not have their ovens in their very small homes. If anything would happen, the men would also come from where they were at work or had gathered.

In a large city like Jerusalem, there were different neighborhoods and, thus, many town squares. The town was divided so that people of different economic and employment status lived in their own areas. Chances are the Apostles were staying in the section where the “common” people or even poorer people lived. The rich or those in positions of power did not intermingle outside of their class. These “higher ups” such as the Temple court or the High Priest had bridges that they could walk over the neighborhoods so they wouldn’t have to go near them? No wonder Jesus preached so often about the poor.

It was perhaps in this poorer neighborhood but still near the center that the Pentecost event took place. The noise of the wind and the different languages being spoken would have brought the people out of their daily routine into the street where any break in the routine was welcomed. It is also here that Peter, joined by the Apostles at last, began to preach.

Today, we celebrate this Pentecost even as we know it still happens, not just once a year, but sometimes each and every day. Some of us experience Pentecost in the gentle blowing of a breeze, the outdoor fire in the summer, the waves lapping on the shore at the lake or ocean, or the sounds of children playing outdoors in the longer days of summer. Others feel the presence of the Holy Spirit whenever we gather to pray and worship God. It may take the form of simply having a friend or spouse nearby, a special prayer, or perhaps a hymn. Many of our older members remember the hymn “Blessed Be the Tie That Bind.” The second and third verses read, “Before our Father's throne/We pour our ardent prayers; Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one/Our comforts and our cares. We share each other's woes,/Our mutual burdens bear; And often for each other flows/The sympathizing tear. While we love these things that tie or bind us

together, we must be mindful to not be bound so that we do not let the Holy Spirit work in us to do the work that we are called to do.

In this Pentecost season as we celebrate being filled with the Holy Spirit, let us pray that the binds that may tie us in the not-so-good ways be broken and allow us to be consumed with the Holy Spirit. It is time for all of us to catch the Spirit and pass it along to others. Our words and actions all give witness to our call as Christians. May we be filled with the Holy Spirit to the point where it overflows and flows out to all. My prayer for all us is that we indeed “Catch the Spirit.”