**Pentecost Sunday, May 24, 2015, Acts 2:1-21; Ps 104; Rom 8:22-27; John 15:26-27;**

**Rev. Mary Trainor**

This week, I worked hard at my desk all day for a couple of days when I was not here or at church meetings in Green Bay. One of those days, I was getting kinda of sleepy, and so I got up just to stretch and went outside -- and blast, oh yeah, I woke up in an instant. It was a cool, strong wind that hit me when I stepped outside. The wind was like a blow dryer on high or a pressure washer. Today, we think about a special kind of wind. It is the feast of Pentecost, the day when the Holy Spirit outpoured upon the disciples, 50 days after Easter. The Holy Spirit is symbolized by white doves, flames, the color red, and the wind. Here we are in our Church with RED doors and RED carpet, and here I am with RED vestments and you are wearing RED. This is not just some cute gimmick, the Holy Spirit pouring out upon us is indeed worth celebrating!

God's Holy Spirit is somewhat like the wind: we can't see it, but it can amaze us and wake us up. The Spirit's wind is a not a meteorological phenomenon but a supernatural thing: it is the breath of God breathed into us - and it fills us with joy and amazement. It is not like a damaging tornado-like wind, although it can be wonderfully strong sometimes. God's Holy Spirit is not scary, but rather is excitingly empowering. In our Acts reading this morning, people watching the disciples full of the Holy Spirit said, "***They are filled with new wine."*** Onlookers thought they were acting so joyous that they must have been drunk! But Peter said, "***these are not drunk***" but rather the Spirit ***poured out*** upon them. They were indeed joyous. How do **we** today know the Holy Spirit is present? We know because we experience the effects of its power in our lives. Three examples: (1)This past week, I needed to provide help to a needy person in Shawano -- only problem was, I wasn't in Shawano; lo and behold, a parishioner called me right at that moment from the church and I was able to ask her if she would help this person out. And she gladly did, with resources provided from the church. Was that a Holy Spirit moment? You betcha! No other explanation exists. (2)This past week, I had a sense that I needed to go see someone and call someone else. Didn't know why, but I followed that sense: I went to see the one person and called the other; both were absolutely needed. Was that the Holy Spirit? You betcha! (3) Recently a parishioner had tears in his eyes when receiving Communion. Later, I asked if he was alright, and he said with his face glowing with joy, "Oh yes, as I received today I truly was filled with the real presence of Christ in a new way." Was that the Holy Spirit? You betcha!

Pentecost Sunday is also considered the birthday of the Church, for it is this day when the real work of the disciples began, following in Jesus' footsteps.....hence the balloons on the pews. Today, here at St. John's, we celebrate the people who have gone before us who were filled with the Spirit. We are the beneficiaries of them allowing the Holy Spirit to fill them up! And, we know they did, because otherwise this church would not still be here ~ 139 years after it began. We are called to continue that work today and into the future. Later in the Gospel of John 20:21 *(our Gospel from a few weeks ago)*, Jesus reminds us that our mission is to continue the work that He began, ***“As the Father has sent me, so I send you***.” This is worded in a different way in Acts 1:8, "***you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses ....to the ends of the earth***." Just as the Spirit filled and empowered the apostles and those who sat in these pews in the past century, the Holy Spirit fills and empowers you and me to reach out and share God's love with others, to help others know of eternal salvation through Jesus.

We are, however, are faced with new challenges in the Church today; challenges we are called to face together. Yes, it is the birthday of the church -- but many are not celebrating today, because they don't like the church. There are a myriad of excuses for their dislike of church, and some of their reasons are justified -- people have been hurt by the church: examples abound about abuse, internal discord, financial misconduct, and judgmentalism. The goal of these folks is to deflate the church of the Holy Spirit. [The word, "deflategate," was coined last week with the controversy about the underinflated footballs *(Quarterback Tom Brady, N E Patriots).*] But the Holy Spirit will not be deflated! Jesus is our Redeemer, our Savior: bigger than all of that stuff. Our God is a God of new beginnings, of love, of healing, of forgiveness. Will the skeptics succeed? Not if we allow God's breath, the Holy Spirit, to fill us. And, God is calling us to reach out to these folks, who so badly need to know Jesus and His love.

Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone was one of those people. He was a rational, well educated citizen in Italy: a well trained soldier and businessman, being groomed by his father to take over the family business. He was a materialistic party boy, who liked to stay out late carousing. In the 13th century, when Giovanni lived, leprosy was a common dreaded disease; Giovanni was disgusted by lepers, and avoided them at all cost. One day, he was praying at the cross of San Damiano, the same cross that hangs above our chapel altar, and God's Spirit spoke to him. From that day on, Giovanni had a new purpose in life: to share God's love, to build up God's kingdom. He gave away everything he owned, and never again possessed anything except a ratty old peasant cloak (which he had the nuns patch over and over again). He now saw it a privilege to tend the wounds of lepers. Giovanni was St. Francis of Assisi. Filled with the Holy Spirit, people from all over and from many generations learned of Jesus' love. How did this change take place? Through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit guides us, leads us, reveals the truth to us, reminds us, comforts us, gives us courage and words. Have you ever been too upset to pray? I sure have. No problem, be reassured, because the Spirit is praying in you and through you. Paul, in our Epistle from Romans today, said, "***the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words***." The Holy Spirit knows us, and lifts up our deepest intentions in prayer.

Spirit of the living God fall afresh on us. Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us. Today as you come forward for Holy Communion, say silently or aloud these words, "**Come Holy Spirit, fall afresh on me."** Amen.