



A close friend of mine, Father John McGowan, likes to tease me that when I am speaking to someone who does not speak English that I often speak in some kind of strange accent, as I continue to speak in English, but more slowly and loudly. The poor listener often starts to laugh since the person is not quite sure what I am trying to do. Language can be a great barrier between people, in particular if you are in another country and looking for a bathroom. Unlike many other people from other lands, I can only speak *Brooklynese English* which is a rather strange language.

I do recall once organizing a trip to the New York Circle line for twelve Redemptorist priests who were attending a meeting in New Jersey. There was no common language among our group, but we had enormous fun, as we ended the day with a nice steak dinner in the city. Somehow, with our very limited knowledge of the languages, using signs and gestures, smiles and laughter, we were able to connect in a very joyful way.

That memory came to me as I reflected on our first reading today. The apostles have a profound experience of the Holy Experience in a rushing wind and in tongues of fire and they rush out from the Upper Room and start preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There were people from all the known world present, each speaking different languages, but they were able to understand the message of the Gospel. This description is the exact opposite one that is recorded in the *Book of Genesis* from the *Old Testament* in the story of the Tower of Babel. The people are growing increasingly distant from God and they decide to build a tower to heaven since they do not want to depend on God. They will get there on their own. The tower eventually collapses in a great heap, and the people suddenly find themselves unable to understand one another since they are all speaking different language. They are latterly babbling to one another.

Since human beings in their pride sought to do without God, the message of the *Bible* and our faith is that God comes to us. In the *Old Testament*, God is present to the people in men like Abraham and Moses, and the prophets. Finally, God sends his son Jesus, and all barriers between humanity and God are shattered as the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. Christ is fully human like every one of us, and fully divine.

Jesus chooses men and women to build his Church, leaves us the great gift of his presence in the Eucharist, and proclaims the promise of eternal life. Before Jesus returns to sit at the right hand of the Father, He promises to send us the Holy Spirit. Today, Pentecost, we see the power of the Holy Spirit. From *The Acts of the Apostles* we hear vivid description: *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. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his native language?"*

The Holy Spirit, unlike the spirit of those who built the Tower of Babel, is one of unity in which the people experience the power of God. The Holy Spirit is the continuing presence of God here on earth until the end of time. You and I live and move and have our being in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Let me try to describe a recent experience our parish had of the Holy Spirit. Our church building did not shake, thank God since I would worry about its effects on the roof, nor did we see visible tongues of fire resting on any one of us. But the Spirit of God was here at every Mass we celebrated as the priest placed his hand over the Eucharist and called down the Holy Spirit to transform ordinary bread and wine into the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Spirit spoke to us every time the Scriptures were read and proclaimed. The Spirit was present in those who stop by during the day, genuflect before the Tabernacle and spend some time in prayer. The Spirit was present in the faith that lit our candles, flameless but faith-filled, in every funeral that proclaimed the promise of eternal life, in the weddings of a young couple who boldly proclaimed before God that they would love each other until death do them part, in the water of our baptismal font where the Spirit was so very present in the life of the parents and family of the infants as they stood and proclaimed they would seek to pass on the Catholic faith to another generation. The Spirit of God moves in the hearts of the priest and penitent as sins are forgiven in the name of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is present in the ordinary struggles, sorrows, and joys of every man, woman and child who comes through the doors of St. Martin's. The Holy Spirit is so very present in our donations to food and assistance to those who are in need. The Holy Spirit is not about church activity. Wherever there is love there is God. Wherever men and women are working for peace, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Wherever there is forgiveness and mercy, it is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Here is the prayer of the great St. Augustine to the Holy Spirit:

*Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy. Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy. Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy. Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. Amen.*