



Things to Ponder

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Where do we come from?

By Rev. Msgr. Kevin T. Hart

Every mother is at one time confronted by the question, “Mommy, where did I come from?” Most people, not just little children, are interested in “where they came from” in terms of their family ancestry, their cultural, ethnic and political heritage. The question is not merely informational, for where we came from determines to a large extent where we are going. On this Pentecost Sunday, the birthday of the Church, we would do well to ask, “Where did we come from?” For in answering that question we also answer the question, “Where are we going?”

Where did the Church come from? How did it begin? Pentecost is seen as the birthday of the Church. But just as a baby exists in embryonic form long before it’s born, the Church was coming into being long before her birthday. The seeds of the Church were sown in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve committed the first sin that altered God’s plan for establishing his kingdom on earth. Was God surprised? I don’t think so. In giving man the gift of freedom, He gave him the ability to choose his course of action even if that meant choosing evil over good. We could say that the Church was conceived in that Garden, because God was all too aware that we would need a savior to save us from ourselves.

Conception leads to gestation, and the Church’s gestation period includes all of Salvation History. Abraham, Moses, all the prophets, the continual breaking and renewing of the Old Covenant, all the way up to the John the Baptist’s call for repentance, trace the development of God’s plan to bring forth that long-awaited Savior. With the birth of Jesus, the Church is not yet born, but is experiencing both joyful and painful birth pangs. With Jesus’ teachings, his miracles, the institution of the Sacraments, his passion, death and resurrection, his promise of eternal life and his ascension into Heaven, we could say that the Church is in the delivery room. Everything was in place; everything is now ready.

When a baby is born, it’s customary for the doctor to give the baby a sharp slap to clear away the mucus that may have collected in the lungs. The sharp slap on the infant Church, the slap that finally brings the Church to birth, was the gift of the Holy Spirit made visible in fire and wind.

In order to burn, fire needs fuel. The fuel for the flames hovering over the heads of the Apostles was the fear and confusion that prevented them from fulfilling Jesus’

last earthly words to them, “Go forth and preach the Gospel to all nations,” fear and confusion that the Holy Spirit reduced to ashes.

The fire was fanned by a strong, rushing wind causing the flames to burn hotter and brighter. Wind, like the Holy Spirit, can push us where we might not want to go. The Apostles had to submit to that Spirit to give up control over themselves in order to remain headed in the right direction by following in the footsteps of Christ.

Although Pentecost was the first birthday of the Church, the Church is born anew in each one of us in the sacrament of Baptism, when we too receive the Holy Spirit. He may not appear to us as tongues of fire or a mighty rushing wind, but his action in us is no less than what he did for the Apostles. We have many things that cause us anxiety. They may include doubts about our faith, insecurity in witnessing to it, anxieties over health issues, financial problems, trouble in our relationships, worries about the future or a decision we have to make. In all these areas, the Holy Spirit invites us to entrust ourselves to him, to reduce those fears and anxieties to ashes.

And as that mighty wind drove the Apostles on a path they had not chosen, He will continue to lead us and guide us to where the Lord wants us to be.

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