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 Church of the Holy Faith  
 Pentecost Year C  
 Acts 2:1-21; Ps 104:25-35, 37;  
 Romans 8:14-17;  
 John 14:8-17, 25-27  
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### Diversity and the Holy Spirit

“You send forth your Spirit, and they are created; and so you renew the face of the earth.” Psalm 104, a portion of which we read today, is a magnificent ode to all God’s creation. In this verse thirty-one, the author recalls the very beginning of creation, as described in the Book of Genesis: when the world was without form and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of darkness, renewing the face of the earth. And what a varied creation the Spirit brought forth! We have an estimated 11,000 identified species of birds; it’s believed there are actually about 20,000. Estimates of the number of species of fungi range from 1.5 to 5 million, with about 14,000 species described as mushrooms. Insects have the highest number of species, with an estimated three million species; beetles alone have almost 400,000 species. I could go on and on, but the point is this: God clearly loves diversity. Among us humans, go to any busy international location such as Heathrow airport and you will quickly see God loves diversity among humanity as well.

Every year on the Feast of Pentecost, our reading from Acts affirms God’s affirmation of diversity. The Holy Spirit here is a violent, fiery force that tosses the one hundred twenty timid Jesus followers out of their hiding place onto the streets of Jerusalem. This is no gentle nudging. The formerly bewildered disciples preach to the crowds gathered for the Jewish celebration of the first fruits of the harvest. Luke, who simply could have said, “people from all over,” takes the time to describe multiple ethnicities of Jews and proselytes, naming fifteen distinctive immigrant

groups from throughout the Mediterranean basin. They are “devout Jews from every nation under heaven.” God could have restrained the disciples to their own dialect, and given the crowd the ability to understand a foreign tongue. Instead, the Holy Spirit speaks in the native tongue of each person gathered, celebrating a multitude of heritages and languages. “We hear them,” the crowd marvels, “in our own languages speaking about God’s deeds of power.” The Holy Spirit sent forth to renew the face of the earth with the diversity of creation in the Book of Genesis, now works through a culturally diverse humanity to inaugurate a new creation and a new covenant. Peter, emboldened as he never has been before, rises to address the crowd. By the time Peter finishes speaking, three thousand converts will be added. These three thousand will then presumably return to Parthia, Mede, Crete, Arabia, and all places in between and carry the fire of the Holy Spirit to a diversity of ethnicities and cultures. “In the last days it will be,” Peter quotes from the prophet Joel, “that I will pour out my Spirit upon *all flesh*.”

I am not sure why we have come to view the word “diversity” with suspicion these days. Perhaps it is a mindset of scarcity, rather than faith in God’s abundance. Perhaps it is fear of the “other.” Perhaps it is an unwillingness to walk a mile in someone else’s shoes. Perhaps it is the comfort of familiarity and distrust of differences. Perhaps it is instinctual, or born of complacency. Whatever the reason, Pentecost reminds us the suspicion is unfounded. The Holy Spirit blew the doors open wide and reached out to bring all people into a life of love and salvation. God in creation embraces diversity and God in his church echoes and welcomes it.

Pentecost is not intended to be a day of nostalgia or mere historical curiosity. Pentecost didn’t only happen thousands of years ago in Jerusalem. As the Rt. Rev. Frank Logue, Bishop of Georgia observed, “It’s important to release this story from its 2,000-year long domestication.” On Pentecost, God launched a fear-inducing, adrenalin-pumping, wind-tossed, fire-singed,

smoke-filled, open-ended array of Holy Spirit possibilities. On Pentecost, God launched a movement that began in diversity, developed into an even more inclusive community through the acceptance of Gentiles, and eventually spread the gospel to all corners of our beautifully divergent earth.

The power of the Holy Spirit on that first Pentecost transcended the fear of differences, and through us, can continue to do so today. In baptism, we are baptized with water, but we also have been [or will be, as is the case for Malia and Mary today] baptized with fire. In baptism, we make the astounding claim that we are united to Christ in his death and resurrection, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked as Christ's own forever. In baptism, we share in Pentecost, just as the apostles and the crowds from "every nation under heaven" did. Baptism IS our Pentecost, it is our reception of the fullness of God dwelling within us, animating us to strive for justice and peace among all people, and transforming us as a people dedicated to seeking and serving Christ in all persons.

As we renew our baptismal vows, as we recite our baptismal covenant, as we welcome the newly baptized, [as we will at the eleven o'clock service], and as we pray for all those seeking the fullness of life in the Holy Spirit, let us dedicate ourselves to live into the vision of that very first Pentecost. Let us pray for the strength and desire to respect and transcend our differences, to view the diversity of God's creation with awe, and to appreciate the diversity of humanity as the blessing God intended. Let us commit anew to acting with love, sincerely welcoming in the church and in our lives, the Spirit of God that has been poured out on all flesh. Amen.