

Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 30, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

“Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 2:38)

I once heard a story of a newly ordained Catholic priest who was asked, by the pastor of the parish in which he was assigned, to accompany the high school youth group as they attended a regional Catholic youth conference. At one point during the conference, the Blessed Sacrament was exposed for the teens to adore. It was during the Eucharistic procession (the procession which carries Jesus, in His Eucharistic Presence, from the tabernacle in one location to the altar in a different, often at a distance, location) that the young priest saw teens falling out onto the floor (he was told they were being “slain in the spirit”), speaking in a form of baby babble, laughing, crying, singing to the over-powering music, and other confusing behaviors (a priest flapping his arms and skipping down the main aisle pretending to be dove representing the spirit). Overwhelmed by the scene going on around him, the priest stepped outside the ballroom to catch his breath. Before him, in an adjacent hall, he saw teens lying on the floor being treated by medical personal. He recounted that some were even covered with blankets, feet elevated, to prevent them from going into shock. As fanciful as the tale may seem, I can attest to the accuracy of the story. Listening to this, coupled with various events I have personally witnessed, I find myself questioning if the event described was, in any way, recognizable to both the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the immediate events which followed on that first Pentecost day? I cannot provide you an answer to this question purposed. Rather, let us reflect, ever so briefly, upon the events of Pentecost, as recounted by Saint Luke, providing you the opportunity to form your own conclusions.

The apostles and disciples have just received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Although normally invisible to our modern eyes, Saint Luke describes the moment as tongues of fire appearing over each person. Saint Peter, now both guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit, proclaims Jesus as the Risen Christ in his first public act as “First among Equals,” describing the relationship of the Apostles. Everyone who listens hears Peter in their own spoken, native language. Peter’s Pentecost message: “Believe, Repent, be Baptized.” His words accompanied by the subtle nudging of the Holy Spirit working within the hearts of his listeners, led to the realization that they were sinners thus beginning their conversion.

The three points of belief, repent, baptism (as a act of conversion from sin) demanded by Saint Peter on Pentecost day are the key to our understanding of this event and, for the most part, of all subsequent events, teachings or preaching concerning the actions of the Holy Spirit. Is their still being proclaimed a call to conversion?

My family, we believe and profess the Holy Spirit to be God and God (the Holy Spirit) does not change nor deviate from His mission which is to remind humanity of the mission, both actions and words, of its Savior. The Holy Spirit still calls us to recognize our own sinfulness, repent of that sinfulness, and undergo a genuine conversion of heart. However this clarion call is being over-shadowed with the buzzwords of inclusion, diversity, equity, and equality by both

society and religion. We are told that our actions are dooming the planet, therefore we must make sacrifices to save our planet and the life contained therein. My family, please, I plead with you, let us focus our efforts on saving our souls. We can drive the latest EVs while recycling and composting, but if we do not save our souls by being faithful Christians, then what a wasted life we would have lived. For the humble/repentant Christian life, filled with the Holy Spirit, will, necessarily, seek to treat God and all of His creation with the love and dignity each deserves, thereby leaving the world a holistically better place while staying on the narrow path towards one's own sanctity.