



PENTECOST
12 June AD 2011

Acts 2:1 -21

Last year Independence Day fell on Sunday; we broke all the rules, we sang patriotic songs of the United States of America, songs of the nation, anthems of our fatherland which are not necessarily the hymns of the faith. Okay, that was one Sunday in twenty years: it was long overdue. We took advantage of the moment to thank God for the blessings he's bestowed on us through us through our homeland.

There is a whole school of thought that conceives the United States as God's country; it believes we're a Christian nation. The notion goes back to Ben Franklin and his boys; they suggested for one side of the Great Seal of the U. S. an image of a people crossing the sea to freedom—an image that might have come right from the Old Testament. A lot of us could get into that. We have all, to greater and lesser degrees, gotten caught up in these conversations with our neighbors. There's more than one legitimate point of view. That's the beauty of America; it's a land for ideas.

I believe the consensus is that while our nation's founders were members of the various Christian traditions, they did not espouse one faith over any other. In the nation's Constitution they enshrined language which protected the churches from the intrusions of government. Today the whole issue is erroneously covered with the label "separation of church and state." And using that label as if it were a Billy club, they swing it at anyone who would so much as utter the name of God in public, or offer to pray.

Just this past week someone circulated newspaper photo of high school youths pausing to pray before a football game. The picture came with the curmudgeonly opinions of Andy Rooney—opinions which most of us would share. He noted a loud and very vocal minority which thought the game should have been forfeit because these boys very blatantly thumbed their noses at the sensitivities of those without a faith in God. Rooney noted that the godless among us are not the only ones with rights.

The American experiment has taught us, *and is still helping us to learn*, how we can live together as one nation. To our dismay the news is full of places with stories of people who can not tolerate each other's presence. The stories are legion that relate how one neighbor rises up against another simply because he has a

different faith; or because they express a value and hold an opinion not in line with the rest of the community.

The God of our Fathers, the God of Pentecost *calls* his Church (calls you and me) *out* of several communities, to stand as one in Christ. First century Judaism was a faith with little tolerance for divergent opinions. The Pharisees hated Saducees: the former believed in the presence of angels and resurrection, the Saducees did not. And neither of them had much tolerance for One who claimed to be messiah. Medieval Christianity wasn't much better.

But we can learn something from the Bible. The word *church* itself means “those who are called out and set apart by God.” We are *the ec-clesia* of God—the ones called and set apart. Luke the evangelist tells us of God's first Church that they were not all one people, but they are diverse group: they were “*the devout from every nation under heaven.*”

And, is it not interesting? Is not humorous, that these devout from every nation, should pick up on the fact that those speaking the Gospel under the direction of God's Holy Spirit, spoke in a Galilean accent? It would be like Ricky Ricardo making a comment about my dad's funny accent.

But this is what God does, he is here on Pentecost harvesting out of the many and diverse communities of the world, a single and like-minded people. We are that people, called to be in the world but not part of it; called to hear “*His Shepherd's voice, and, hearing Him be one*” (569:3). Yes, we are God's witnesses, reminders to people everywhere that we do not live for ourselves... Paul says it best, “*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)*”

Last Sunday Pres. Klettke reminded each one of you that you are a priest, we serve God as a royal priesthood according to 1 Peter 2:9. God has entrusted to his Church the ministry of prayer and intercession. Between Easter and Pentecost we find the Church waiting and praying for the promise of Jesus. Apparently God was waiting too—he waited from Passover/ Easter until the next holiday, a harvest festival, Pentecost. He waited until the city was full again; and then he acted.

Today we celebrate God on the move, God in action: heaven is opened, the Spirit is poured out, and the doors of the Kingdom are opened wide to all who will enter following the voice of the Shepherd, heeding his Word. Peter promises us, that “*all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.*” The Spirit makes it possible

for you and me to hear the Shepherd's voice *still*. That Spirit makes us one people, the people of God; we are the elect, the saved, the ransomed, we are the fellowship of those "who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb."

By way of a cross God in Christ did a mighty deed. At the Cross God everything that was needed to win you, heart and soul, for his kingdom. Its been theorized that the Acts of the Apostles was written, not so much as a history of the early Church but as an apologetic document, to show the authorities that they had nothing to fear from Christianity; that those who count themselves citizens of heaven first, pose no threat to the civil order and society.

I like that idea. If only those without God and without the need for faith could understand that you and I, their Christian neighbors, don't pose them any harm. Until they get the message we must go right on praying, meeting, doing good in the name of our Messiah, and working for the day of his return.

In the name of Jesus. Amen

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