

REFLECTIONS FOR PENTECOST SUNDAY ~ 28 May 2023

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Today is Pentecost Sunday! This feast marks the birth-day of our Church, the day when the Spirit of God is poured abundantly on the disciples with the promise that the same Spirit will be poured abundant on us who follow.

The first Pentecost happens at the moment of the creation of the cosmos. In Genesis 1, we read, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the spirit of God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Gen 1:1-3). The Spirit and light bring the cosmos into being. Psalm 104 beautifully echoes the presence of the Spirit in the creation of the cosmos, “In wisdom you have made them all; Earth is full of your creatures” (Ps 104:24), a creation that continues from day to day to day, “When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground” (Ps 104:30).

Later in Genesis, we read of God’s first covenant, a covenant with all Earth and Earth beings, “God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living



creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and Earth” (Gen 9:12-13). The Spirit and light mark the relationship between God and all Earth. A further chapter of Genesis, however, shows the breaking down of that relationship marked by the attempt to build the Tower of Babel for, although “the whole earth had one language and the same words” (Gen 11:1), the people turned against God. In response, God

“confused the language of all the earth” (Gen 11:9), and the people no longer understood or trusted each other. A new Pentecost was needed.

In today’s readings in the Liturgy of the Word, we welcome that new Pentecost, described in two different ways. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read of the experience of the disciples, hearing “a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability” (Acts 1:2-4). In the verses which follow, the people of many languages are amazed – their languages do not become one; rather “in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power” (Acts 1:11).

The second telling of the coming of the Spirit is in John’s Gospel which happens immediately after Easter. The disciples are gathered in the Upper Room, not in hope as they are in Acts, but in fear. There are no sounds of mighty winds or divided tongues of fire. Instead, Jesus gently appears among them and shows them the wounds of his hands and side. The disciples’ fear turns to joy as Jesus tells them that he is sending them out. Then he “breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (Jn 20:22).

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, assures us that this diverse memory of the coming of the Spirit is at the heart of our faith, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:4-7). It has taken us so long to treasure that diversity, to delight in our differences, to say with Elizabeth Johnson csj, "The dignity of difference is a source of blessing."

It has been said of Hildegard of Bingen that for her theology is as much visual as verbal. Let us then reflect visually on the wonder and the joy and the hope of today's Pentecost with a painting entitled *Pentecost* by the German priest and artist, Sieger Köder.



The colour red dominates – the color of the fire, the embers, love, the Passion, the Spirit. The old Tower of Babel is replaced with a house of windows wide open. Below on the right and left, we see the remnants of that tower unfinished with people standing in the dark: closed, isolated, grumpy, resigned, lonely, exhausted, anxious, and in despair. They have lost their relationship with God and, without a relationship to God and without God's Spirit, they have lost their relationship with one another – the house remains unfinished.

At the bottom centre, we see Peter, holding a book with both sides covered by the Greek word, εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*, *good news*). Around him are the disciples of Jesus, gathered to pray and covered with tongues of fire (with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, on the right in a headscarf). Above them are 20th century witnesses from three ecclesiastical traditions: the Lutheran pastor, theologian and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, holding the Bible; the Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople (1948 to 1972) who championed *unity through diversity* with his "brother Paul VI" and, in 1965, revoked the

ecclesiastical excommunication of 1054 against the Catholic Church, holding the Easter candle; and Pope John XXIII with his trademark, outstretched arms and open hands as a sign of warm affection for all people and above him his encyclical, "Pacem in Terris."

On the next level is the younger generation: an altar boy with a censer spreading the fragrance of Christ out into the Earth, a German youth leader holding a flag with the *Chi Rho* monogram of Christ, and a young woman and a young black man holding a banner with the Inscription "*Shalom – Peace*." At the uppermost level, you can only see the lower part of the window and, while open, it is still empty. Sieger Köder said that this is the most important window, the window of the future. It is the window where you and I will stand. What are we holding? Whom are we welcoming? Who is welcoming us? To whom are we reaching out? Who is leaning out the window with us?

Köder's painting holds the power and flames and energy of the Acts account. The painting also holds the wounds (perhaps the kindling for the fire) and the gentleness, the peace of the account in the gospel of John. The diversity between the two accounts is highlighted by the diversity of languages written in the painting and the diversity of faith traditions, ages, genders, and roles of the figures in the painting – all coming from different periods of history. It holds our past, our present, and our future. I invite you this week to take time with this painting. I invite you to gaze on it with the eyes of your heart.

Having been led by Hildegard into this visual theology of Pentecost, we end with one of her poems. describing her vision of God's Spirit. This is the same Spirit who is poured out abundantly every day on you and me, on every person we meet, on every Earth being we encounter, on Earth, and on the cosmos:

Spirit of fire,
Paraclete, our Comforter,
You are the *Live* in alive,
the *Be* in every creature's being,
the *Breathe* in every breath on earth. ...
Holy Life-Giver, Doctor of the desperate,
Healer of everyone broken past hope,
Medicine for all wounds,
Fire of love, Joy of hearts,
fragrant Strength, sparkling Fountain,
in You we contemplate
how God goes looking for those who are lost
and reconciles those who are at odds with Him.
Break our chains!
You bring people together.
You curl clouds, whirl winds,
send rain on rocks, sing in creeks,
and turn the lush earth green.
You teach those who listen,
breathing joy and wisdom into them.
We praise You for these gifts,
Light-giver, Sound of joy, Wonder of being alive,
Hope of every person, and our strongest Good.

Happy Pentecost!



**Veni Sancte Spiritus, Adam Kossowski
Ca.1955
[Original source](#)**



This miniature from Hildegard's *Vision Three* depicts the universe in the urform of the world egg, illuminated by stars and planets and refreshed by winds, has our common home (Earth) at creation's center. Hildegard's cosmic egg also resembles a nest, symbolizing God's Alpha-and-Omega nature. We see that the miniature's outermost ovoid of shining fire signifies God's Spirit holding the cosmos together with all-embracing divine love, bathing the world in the celestial fire that incubates new life.