

Blessed be God who animates our lives and causes the Holy Spirit to inspire and illuminate and irradiate our lives that we might live in blessed communion. AMEN

The great preacher William Sloane Coffin wrote: Our business in life is less to make something of ourselves than to find something worth doing and losing ourselves in it.

We don't often think enough on Pentecost of it being a day to consider and discern our vocational choices but I wonder if that is one of the main things going on here, especially as it is a day of confusion and chaos in which we often lose ourselves...remembering that Jesus tells us that is when we find us!

The Holy Spirit comes upon us and causes a chaotic diverse confusion which is characterized by flames and wind and tongues. But when the wind stills and the flame smolders, we realize we have been inspired, literally breathed into by holiness itself.

We individually and collectively are transformed...

The Holy Spirit brings gifts and fruits, which are itemized and fleshed out in Paul's letters especially. The gifts of the Holy Spirit variously numbered are: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation, administration, service.

The fruits are: love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness mildness, faith, humility, and temperance. We know that those gifts are meant to be used to the glory of God and those fruits define and build our character as we do so.

So Pentecost and the readings today might be a time to reconsider your own gifts and character: are you called to be a generous pastoral type, a patient teacher, or a kind prophet. Or are you making life choices based on secular power and prestige?

When I was young I attended the Calvert School in Baltimore. It was a very exclusive and competitive place. It was rigorous and heralded a system of sameness relying primarily on rote memorization. It was famous for its home instruction program which was sent all over the world to promote this kind of "learning" in remote locations.

I do not say this to brag but I excelled at this school by its standards. I say it to indicate the limitation I came to understand.

We were graded by numericals for content and alphabetical for effort. So a 1A was the best one could do. I remember in second grade getting 5 1As and 1 1B. A 1B how is that possible?!?! My effort was insufficient? But I had achieved as high a grade as I could get?

So I summoned up the courage to speak with Mrs. Cissel, a rather stern character! she had only days before shot a rubberband at a classmate which missed and hit me! so my self esteem was at an all time low?! Anyway, she calmly and seriously told me that she knew I could try harder? I didn't know what that looked like? If everything was correct? how would I try harder?

Her answer stayed with me: you could take some risks, you could give some unexpected unsought answers, you could stretch your brain which may not be being stretched enough (I remember thinking that was her job but did not venture an argument)

From that day forward I at least knew that there was a difference between deriving one's sense of self from a system's rigid tests and spitting back correct answers, and exploring parts of oneself risking some affirmation from a spiritual source.

I certainly don't claim that as a second grader I had turned over a new leaf but I will say it was one of the most formative experiences I have had and served to catch me up short when I thought grades and awards were more than hollow achievements. when I thought accolades and praise were equal to love. And as I look back over my life this tension between compliance and creativity has propelled me and enlivened me. In short I find my true self in discernment of God's will which is often devoid of material acclaim. In fact, obedience to God's will, like Mary's yes to the angel, is profoundly joyful and liberating.

So with Mrs. Cissel, with whom I became great friends, I began to learn that rote obedience to a human set of rules and laws can be entrapment. Following one's imagination and God's call is paradoxically perfect freedom.

God calls us to liberation, to be unbound and unfettered. God calls us to lives of obedience to the Divine which is very different from compliance with civil law. Yet we continue to struggle with the notion that obedience is anything but subservance or limiting.

In Genesis, in the story of Babel, God intervenes in order to reveal this difference. It becomes very very clear that God breathes into a city of sameness which appeared to create a false confidence and power, a spirit of variety and difference. At the very least we must pay attention to the value revealed in diversity and God's pattern of intervention, unrest and revelation. Babolites who had previously been self assured, were broken of their sameness and supposed power, when God decided they needed to be confused, confused by diverse languages which might be a metaphor for diversity of culture, ethnicity and other human categories!

In the story of Babel we learn that there is little inspiration and certainly little glory to God in mindless uniformity. In fact pervasive dictated language often accompanies

empire. The energy and creativity which accompany Kingdom of God are mysterious and uncertain.

Calvert School was my Babel. A comfortable bastion of sameness appeared to offer a unity of security if one simply complied. I was very very good at compliance. The Holy Spirit came in the form of Mrs. Cissel to shatter my assumptions and teach me a new and inspired way to be.

the story of Babel teaches us that oneness is not sameness. Look they are all one is God's observation of judgement which then becomes confused with chaotic babble not necessarily as condemnation as much as demonstration

confusion and chaos precede creation and learning; witness the creation of the world

Similarly in Acts we yet again hear the story of fire and split tongues and languages filling a sanctuary after the sound of wind, another creative symbol. Wind troubled the waters and precedes the beautiful divine stillness.

What we are witnessing today is the Holy Spirit. Unlike God the Creator or God the Redeemer which seem to be revealed in visible touchable stories of creatures and restoration and incarnation, the Spirit is invisible yet comes to us to make that which is visible holy. The Spirit sanctifies. Its presence which we invoke in the Eucharist and at Baptism, comes among us and amongst the elements of creation and imbues us with divinity, energy, grace and love.

St Ignatius suggests that it is the Holy Spirit which brings us life! Life in its fullness is rich and various and can be messy! It is that which calls us to be fully alive!

And it in that power that we return to the opening lines of this sermon and think about the Holy Spirit, promised to come and be with us once Jesus departed. This Holy Spirit inspires us - each of us - in infinitely various ways.

Each of us has a different assembly of gifts and each of us bears uniquely grown fruits.

On Pentecost all the permutations and combinations of our unique beings are validated, actually sanctified. Being a lawyer, a doctor, a teacher, an electrician, an administrator, a clerk, a parent...are in God's eyes equally valued so long as...so long as we fully inhabit and occupy those roles.

God calls us to become our truest selves, not robotic workers, not idle greedy consumers. The Holy Spirit comes among us to infect us with our God given

uniqueness to light up our gifts that we might recognize and live into them and to remind us of the fruits of our labors, the fruits of our discernment.

We individually have been transformed. Our unique selves have become more of that which God calls us to be; we have been inspired, breathed into by the Holy Spirit that we might become our fullest selves. And our community has stepped further into communion, rejecting sameness for sameness sake and embracing union with something mysterious and wondrous.

I invite you to look around you today and everyday and ask yourselves how is the Holy Spirit working in you? How is it working in your family and in your community? The answer will be holy one if it is marked by excitement, diversity and liveliness!

I close with a poem which inspired the Reggio Emilio pedagogy. Reggio Emilio schools began in Italy and are known for their emphasis on supporting the uniqueness of each child. It embraces process over product, exploration over exploitation, creativity over conformity. Chaos is transformed by imagination.

The Hundred Languages of Children

No way.

The hundred is there.

The child is made of one hundred. The child has a hundred languages

a hundred hands

a hundred thoughts

a hundred ways of thinking

of playing, of speaking.

a hundred, always a hundred

ways of listening

of marveling, of loving

a hundred joys

for singing and understanding

a hundred worlds to discover

a hundred worlds to invent

a hundred worlds to dream.

The child has a hundred languages (and a hundred hundred hundred more) but they steal ninety-nine.

The school and the culture separate the head from the body. They tell the child to think without hands to do without head

to listen and not to speak

to understand without joy

to love and to marvel

only at Easter and Christmas.

They tell the child

to discover the world already there and of the hundred

they steal ninety-nine.
They tell the child
that work and play
reality and fantasy
science and imagination
sky and earth
reason and dream
are things
that do not belong together.
And thus they tell the child
that the hundred is not there.
The child says
“No way – The hundred is there.”
Loris Malaguzzi (translated by Lella Gandini)

You are the children of God no matter how old and it is never too late to realize your incredibly unique perspectives in the world. Whenever you are doing that which makes you feel the most alive...that is where God is. (St Ignatius.)
May we pray for the Holy Spirit to illuminate and irradiate our lives! May we know the hundred is there!