

Pentecost is a sign that God is always with us

On Sunday, we celebrate the great Solemnity of Pentecost. Fifty days after Easter and 10 days after the Ascension, we rejoice in the pouring out of the Spirit of the Risen Christ for the life and dynamism of the church.

The Acts of the Apostles tells us the story of the Spirit's power in the lives of those who were the first community of believers in what was called the Way. Among the fruits of the Spirit were: strength and courage for those who fled from Jesus when he was most in need of their friendship; unity among those of different language and culture; and a sense of belonging to one another, which led them to share their goods so that no one among them stood in need.

Through the Spirit poured out on them, their numbers increased, the faith spread to surrounding communities, and hearts were changed. What else but such a powerful gift could have strengthened Peter for fearless preaching after his earlier cowardice, or changed Paul from one who persecuted believers into one who believed.

It is a wonderful story about the power of God's spirit, human freedom and the powerful beauty that emerges when they are in harmony one with the other. God loved us enough to lavish on us the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

An added measure of that love is that

along the way



By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

we are able freely and fully to accept, make our own choices and share with others the gifts all of us receive from the same Spirit.

Nowhere in the Acts of the Apostles is it suggested that the gift of the Holy Spirit exempted the members of the early church or its readers from the demands of human life. Rather, indicators are that the Spirit sustained them, guided them and strengthened them to deal with the tough questions they faced.

Through it all the same Spirit formed them more in the image of Christ and drew them closer to one another.

To replace Judas with Matthias, they relied on prayer and a kind of drawing. To decide issues of membership and what was to be required of those who wished to join their number, they relied on prayer and some debate, which could get quite sharp at times. To express their solidarity with other communities, they joined in

prayer for one another, but also shared from their substance with other communities in need.

On this warm May night in Rochester, New York, in the year 1999, I remember the Pentecost event and the great stories of the Acts of the Apostles. I take much encouragement from them. They are a reminder to us to dwell on the mystery of the church that we are. We need the gift of the Spirit for our life and growth no less than did those earliest communities of believers.

They had to think about how they organized the life of the local churches, and so do we. Circumstances challenged them to find the best way to relate to the wider church. The realities of today's world do the same to us. Their growth in a variety of cultures demanded that they separate the core of faith from cultural and man-made add-ons. In today's church we have the same challenge.

Two millennia separate us from the Acts of the Apostles. Changes beyond our imagining have occurred since them. All signs indicate that change in the years ahead might even accelerate.

What we can bank on is that God will always remain faithful to us, and that our efforts to respond in faith — though they may entail a share in the cross of Christ — will draw us ever more deeply into his life. Peace to all.

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- 1 T
2. F (brothers),
3. F (John),
4. T
5. T
6. F (Stephen),
7. T
8. F (Revelation)

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