

## Pentecost C 2019 Sermon

### *John 14:8-17 (25-27)*

*Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.*

*"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."*

Let's face it: we don't know what to do with Pentecost.

We really get into Christmas, decorating our houses inside and out, sending cards, buying and giving presents, enjoying wassail or eggnog. Easter, too, is a holiday that our culture has appropriated. We decorate eggs, then hide them and hunt for them. We eat chocolate bunnies and marshmallow Peeps, buy Easter lilies, have Easter brunch with family, buy new Easter clothes. People who never attend Church the rest of the year will come to worship on Christmas and Easter.

But Pentecost? We don't send Pentecost cards, buy Pentecost candy or flowers, exchange Pentecost gifts, buy new Pentecost clothes, or go to some fancy restaurant for Pentecost brunch. Merchants make no money from Pentecost.

Why is this? Why can't we sink our teeth into this Feast of the Holy Spirit? Perhaps it is because it celebrates something that is unseen and internal; and, for the most part, we 21<sup>st</sup> Century Americans are not very good at either the unseen or the internal. Fr. John Shea writes: "On the whole, people are more familiar with physical and social reality than they are with spiritual reality... Basically, they are looking **outside** for the appearance of something that could qualify as 'God.'"<sup>1</sup>

And we have that, to an extent, in Jesus: God-made-flesh, born in a manger at Christmas, crucified on a cross on Good Friday, risen from the grave on Easter, and then appearing to his disciples in a tangible-enough form that he can be touched and eat solid food (Luke 24:39-43).

But the Holy Spirit is unseen and *intangible*. And, in addition, we have a hard time identifying with the Pentecost story. I mean, when was the last time you saw tongues of flame over people's heads, or found yourself suddenly able to understand a foreign language you had never heard before? And so, when we are asked about the meaning of Pentecost, we are likely to respond with an insipid, "Oh, that's the day we wear red."

In today's Gospel, Philip has this same problem: He says to Jesus, "Lord, *show* us the Father, and we will be satisfied." And Jesus responds, with noticeable frustration, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen *me* has seen the Father." The problem, of course, is that Philip has only seen the outside of Jesus, seen with the eye of the flesh, but not with the eye of the heart, which sees *spiritual* reality – that which is **not** physically visible. If Philip had been looking with the eye of the heart, he would have seen in Jesus both the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Writing to some Christians in Corinth who were having a similarly difficult time with seeing with the eye of the heart, St. Paul said, "...[W]e look **not** at what can be seen but at what **cannot** be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what **cannot** be seen is eternal." (2 Cor. 4:18)

Our physical bodies, which we can see, will one day die and decay; but our spirits, our souls, will live on. And yet we spend so little time listening to, and nurturing, our souls, our inner spirit; that part of us which is all that will be left when we die – who we are in God. Again, St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16) For much of our modern Western society, I'm afraid, the answer to that question is, "No. We do *not* know that the Spirit of God dwells in us."

And yet the fact remains, we **are** *spiritual* beings; and we were created with a hunger for **real** spiritual food. Some people who are hungry for spiritual food turn to spiritual substitutes. Psychological researcher Dr. Clay Routledge published a book last year titled, "*Supernatural: Death, Meaning, and the Power of the Invisible*," in which he writes about some of the fallout from the decline, over the past 20 years or so, in the number of people who attend church or identify with any religion. "[T]hose who do not frequently attend church are twice as likely to believe in ghosts as are regular churchgoers," Routledge notes. "Americans are becoming *more* skeptical about religion but *less* skeptical about astrology. Paranormal tourism (e.g., visiting a haunted house) is on the rise. The U.S. has an estimated 1,200 haunted houses generating around \$500 million in yearly revenue — both figures reflect a doubling within the last decade. More and more people are consuming self-help spiritual books and media oriented toward an interest in the supernatural. Young adults are *less* religious than older generations but are *more* inclined to believe in ghosts, astrology, and

clairvoyance.”<sup>2</sup> Our souls are spirit-hungry, and we will seek spiritual nourishment either from God or from some other source which may not really be that nourishing at all.

And, my friends, it is at the level of our soul, our spirit, that we find **meaning** in life – *not* “out there.” Richard Rohr writes, “...I think of soul as anything’s ultimate meaning which is held within. Soul is the blueprint inside of every living thing that tells it what it is and what it can become...”

“Many human beings simply haven’t found their own blueprint or soul... They do *have* a soul, but it seems to be dormant, disconnected, lacking grounding...”<sup>3</sup> [W]e are facing today a deep crisis of meaning, which has become a crisis of hope, and an empty frenetic scramble for external power, perks, and possessions. It will never work. Meaning always comes from *within*.”<sup>4</sup>

In her book *Prayers from a Nonbeliever*, artist and author Julia Cameron is perplexed that she isn’t happy despite having a cushy existence. She writes, “my life is stuffed to the gills with people, places, and things that *ought* to make me happy, but they don’t.” Commenting on this, spiritual director and retreat leader Tom Stella writes, “It can be hard to admit being discontent when **we** have so *much* and so many have so little, but it is not uncommon to feel empty in the midst of plenty, to experience a hunger that nothing or no one can satisfy... It is not possible to be fully content or satisfied for long by ‘creature comforts’ or ‘professional accomplishment.’ True happiness eludes us when we attempt to grasp the things we believe will bring it about, for it is not something we can attain through attainments.”<sup>5</sup>

My friends, this almost single-minded attempt to find happiness *outside of* ourself is the source of many of our problems today. I have to believe that the opium crisis today has spun out of control in part because people feel empty or bereft of meaning on the inside, and they seek to fill that emptiness with a substance outside of themselves. I also believe that we have gotten ourselves into all sorts of problems in our world because we believe the answers lie in making our outer world the way **we’d like** it to be. And when we are cut off from our own soul, the way we’d like the outward world to be is almost always self-serving. To try to find ultimate meaning by forcefully attempting to make our outward world after our own liking inevitably fails, since meaning comes from within, from our soul, from the indwelling Holy Spirit. As Julia Cameron found out, even when we do manage to achieve everything we *thought* would make us happy, it doesn’t; for true happiness eludes us when we attempt to grasp the things we believe will bring it about. Happiness is not something we can attain through attainments; it is something we discover within.

The story is told of a man named Nasruddin, who was out in the street searching frantically for something. A neighbor passing by asked, “What are you searching for, Nasruddin?” “My key,” he responded; “I’ve lost my key.” So the neighbor

joined in the search. Another neighbor passed by, asked what was going on, and also joined in the search; and then another, and another. After about 20 minutes of searching, one of the neighbors asked Nasruddin, “Can you remember *where* you lost the key?” And Nasruddin immediately responded, “In the house; I lost the key in the house.” “Then why are you searching for it in the street?” the neighbor asked. “Because there is more light outside,” Nasruddin responded. <sup>6</sup>

Everybody is looking for the key to happiness. Many of us look for it outside ourselves, in the physical and social sphere, where we spend most of our time, and where the eye of our flesh and the eye of the mind can see most clearly. But the key to happiness was not lost “out there,” and it cannot be found “out there.” The key was lost within, and that is where we must seek it. “[The Father] will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever,” Jesus promises his disciples in today’s Gospel. “This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”

My friends, if the Feast of Pentecost tells us anything, it is that the key is not to be found “out there.”

AMEN

1 John Shea, *Following Love into Mystery*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010, p. 194

2 <https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/07/traditional-religion-has-social-value-individual-quests-leave-people-isolated/>

3 Daily email meditation, March 5, 2018 <https://cac.org/the-soul-of-all-things-2018-03-05/>

4 from Richard Rohr, *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality*, Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2008

5 Tom Stella, *CPR for the Soul: Reviving a Sense of the Sacred in Everyday Life*, British Columbia, Canada: Wood Lake Publishing, 2017

6 This story is found, in varying forms, all over the internet!