

Rev. Derek Fairman

Solemnity of Pentecost

Today we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We celebrate the beginning of the Church. We also call to mind the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we have received, as well as the fruits of the Holy Spirit. One of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is joy. That means that when the Holy Spirit is within our souls, that good seed bears good fruit and if the Holy Spirit is within our souls, we will bear the fruit of joy. We have to ask ourselves about that joy.

The Holy Spirit brought joy to those who were awaiting the Lord Jesus. We know that the archangel Gabriel brought joy to Mary when he announced God's plan to her, and she was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. She joyfully then visited Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant John leaped in her womb. Elizabeth herself was filled with the Holy Spirit, and cried out, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

Mary herself too was filled with God's grace and the Holy Spirit, and she responded with the Magnificat, or Mary's song of praise: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my savior." Later, after the birth of John the Baptist, Elizabeth's husband Zechariah was also filled with the Holy Spirit and sang his own canticle of praise. We can see that the Holy Spirit brought joy to Mary, Elizabeth and Zechariah.

At the Nativity of the Lord, the angels sang their praises to the newborn Infant, and the shepherds did the same. Later, when Mary and Joseph brought the Infant to the Temple, they met Simeon, an older man who was filled with the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Family came into the Temple, Simeon took the Lord Jesus into his arms and blessed him and sang his own canticle of praise. Anna was a widow who was given the gift of prophecy, and at that time she also spoke the praises of the Lord Jesus.

Later, the Lord Jesus Himself rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and prayed: "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will." What does all this mean? It seems like there is a connection between joy or rejoicing and the Holy Spirit. Also, this joy is often expressed in singing.

Now, we should not confuse this true joy with a false sense of joy. We might also associate joy with laughter or with smiling. However, there can be many reasons why we laugh or smile that do not come from the Holy Spirit. We can laugh at a joke that comes at the expense

of another person. We can smile or laugh at an inappropriate joke. When someone that we do not like then fails at something, that can make us smile. However, whatever makes us laugh or smile in those situations does not come from the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps something that helps us to distinguish true joy from a false sense of joy is the Lord's promise, that He would give us a joy that no one can take from us. Now, a false sense of joy can easily be taken from us. We might laugh at others, but we don't like others laughing at us. We might want to feel a sense of vindication when others fail, but we don't like others rejoicing when we fail.

We might also think about those situations in which we feel like we have been proven right about something. Perhaps we were arguing with someone and we felt like we won the argument. Except that later we would find out that we were not right. Besides being proven wrong later, we also did not help our friendship. Maybe we found a lot of joy at the time, but it did not last when we were proven wrong later. This is also a source of false joy.

The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of love. As St. Paul teaches us, love is patient and kind, it is not jealous, pompous, inflated, quick-tempered or rude. Love does not seek its own interests. Love does not brood over injuries or rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. True joy comes from the Holy Spirit. True joy comes from love and patience and kindness and from the truth. We only lose that joy when we reject the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Maybe we wonder if any of the joy in our lives is true joy, or if it is all false joy. Well, the Holy Spirit will guide us into true joy and leave behind any false joy. The Holy Spirit can guide us into a sense of wonder at what God does in our lives. Mary, Elizabeth and Zechariah rejoiced at the new things that God was doing in their midst. That joy from the Holy Spirit led them to rejoice in song. They were responding to the gifts that God had given them. They too were filled with a sense of wonder.

As we approach the altar, we think about the emptiness that false joy brings us. We want joy to be in our lives, but then something takes that joy away. When we find true joy, nothing can take away true joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. The joy that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit does not leave us empty but will fill our lives with wonder. The joy that comes from the Holy Spirit will still be there, no matter what suffering we must endure. If we want to experience true joy, we ask the Holy Spirit to come into our lives. We ask the Holy Spirit to clear away the thorns of false joy from our souls, so that we may bear the good fruit of true joy.