

Pentecost Sunday - C

One of the things that happens on Superbowl Sunday you might not remember.

We talk about the game, we talk about the commercials, but this aspect of the game can escape our notice.

It usually comes at the end and is a recognition that not only is the game ending, but that the Superbowl is also the end of the football season.

And so, at some point the announcers acknowledge that fact by thanking one another, and commending one another for a successful broadcast season.

And then, they go down the list of thanking the crew. Sometimes they even take a camera into the production van so we can see the people behind the scenes who make televising the game possible.

In one sense, today we celebrate the person of the Holy Trinity who works behind the scenes in the drama of redemption.

Pentecost can be difficult to celebrate. Christmas is easy, right? Everyone has an experience of babies. And so, to celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus we have only to bring all those warm feelings we have for babies in general to bear on the celebration of the birth of our Savior.

Easter can be a bit more difficult. We don't have any direct experience of someone being raised from the dead, but Easter does plug into our hope that what we hear in the Gospel stories of Christ's resurrection will apply to us and to our loved ones when our days on this earth come to an end.

And then, there's the Pentecost and the descent of the Holy Spirit....

Now, there are people in our midst who have had powerful experiences of the Holy Spirit moving in their lives, often in connection with being at the end of their rope and being saved and brought back among the living.

I count myself among that number.

It's not a universal experience, though. Many followers of Jesus believe in the truth of the gospel and are still waiting for something dramatic like what we here in today's first reading to happen to them.

We shouldn't jump to the conclusion, though, that the Holy Spirit works in the lives of some people and leaves the rest to fend for themselves.

In fact, upon reflection, the drama of my own encounters with a palpable experience of the movement of the Holy Spirit in my life, I have to chalk up to my own hardheadedness and resistance to grace than anything else.

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If I had been open to the movement of the Spirit, I've come to believe that a dramatic intervention would not have been necessary.

Given all that is working, and has been working since the day of the first Pentecost, it seems that the Holy Spirit's preferred mode of activity is to not draw attention to himself.

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of self-sacrificing service, which has no need to seek the limelight.

When we celebrate Pentecost we give time and space to reflect on the evidence of the Spirit's presence, indirect though it may be, and rejoice and give thanks for it.

When we see, for example, that even now, 2000 years after Jesus' resurrection, the community of disciples have managed to continue the journey of faith in spite of all the headwinds that threaten us, we can look behind the scenes and see the Holy Spirit at work.

Even now we find that there are still those among us who respond to the call of the gospel with generosity and without counting the cost, we can draw the conclusion that the Holy Spirit must still be moving hearts.

If you have ever met someone who fits that bill, I'm sure he or she would assure you that they are only able to

do so because of the Holy Spirit's support and guidance.

And each of us has that indefinable part of our life which goes beyond our control and leads us into experiences of profound beauty, clarifying truth, and heart-stirring goodness.

If we want, we can ascribe all that to other causes. The Holy Spirit will not complain or raise an objection. He is not about that.

But if we allow that the Holy Spirit can be behind those things, working for the good of us all and bringing us along toward the fulfillment of God's plans for us, things open up for us and we begin to see connections which escaped our notice before.

And then we are filled with awe—which is the most telling sign of the presence of God.

Today, the liturgy affords us the possibility, through sacramental signs of fire, water, bread and wine, incense, song to take the camera behind the scenes—into the production van, as it were, to see who is making this all possible.

And that leads us to give thanks, to do Eucharist, and so remove the barriers that keep the Holy Spirit from working more completely in our lives and bringing us together into the fullness of the kingdom.