

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

May 20, 2018

Pentecost Sunday

Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11 + 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13 + John 20: 19-23



Reflection by: Sister Elizabeth Michael Boyle, O.P.

Every year it seems that the Pentecost narrative becomes more realistic than fantastic. Ideally, every year some detail in the scene becomes a symbol making scripture read with contemporary relevance. This year, perhaps because we've had so many storms lately, the most compelling detail in the Pentecost drama for me is the wind. The "sound of a mighty wind" used to sound poetic and exhilarating. But in reality, wind, with all its noise and disruption, is rarely welcome. Wind can be more frightening than inspiring. Let's face it, the chief effect of wind is above all *destructive*. Again and again this year, gale-force winds have littered our landscape with severed branches, and brutal hurricanes have torn our favorite trees up by their roots. Does the 21st century arrival of the Holy Spirit look like this? We like to imagine the Holy Spirit coming quietly, gently, inspiring the individual soul and/or the Church with perfect clarity followed by perfect peace. But when we take seriously the symbolism in today's first reading, we will recognize our current tumultuous moment in history as a sign of the Spirit's coming, not of divine departure. We can expect, perhaps, even more purifying destruction. Before we can receive the Spirit's fullness, a mighty wind must strip away our last residual foliage of theological, cultural, and personal delusion. On the first Pentecost, the noise from heaven was followed by the earthly noise from a crowd of foreigners. The multilingual crowd who listened to the disciples resembled the unnerving voices we hear from displaced people in today's global migrations. We should not be surprised to hear the kind of noise and confusion that accompany crowds of people speaking different tongues. In 2018, we will take seriously the call of the Spirit to respond to the needs of people who do not speak our language. And when they show us their wounds, we will recognize in them the language Jesus used to identify himself. Only then will He calm the mighty wind with his signature: "My peace be with you."