

## Solemnity of Pentecost

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by

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“Tender Mercies” was a heartwarming academy award-winning movie that came out many years ago. I don’t remember many movies but I do recall this one. I particularly remember a scene in a country church somewhere in rural Texas where Robert Duvall, who plays a recovering alcoholic country singer, gets baptized along with a young boy. The two get a thorough dunking not once but three times. When he comes up for air after the third dunking, the young boy shakes the water off his head, unplugs his nose, and asks Duvall, “Do you feel any different? I don’t feel any different.”

So let me ask you. It’s Pentecost. We’re just completing a fifty day Easter celebration. Do you feel any different? I’m willing to wager that you don’t. Most of you, anyway. Should you?

Arguably, yes.

Think back to all that has happened over fifty days. I am sure your first thoughts are about the impact of the coronavirus on your lives. The stay at home restrictions. Not being able to celebrate the Mass with your fellow parishioners at your parish church. But during the fifty days we have also re-lived in Word and Sacrament via EWTN, YouTube, video or livestreaming the saving mysteries of our faith from the Last Supper, to the crucifixion, to Easter’s empty tomb. We’ve had encounters with the Risen Lord in the locked upper room, on the road to Emmaus, along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and on the hilltop of the Ascension. Shouldn’t we feel different? I suppose we should and it would be great if we did. But, my friends, it’s less important – far less important – that we FEEL different than that we BE different. Feelings are a bonus. Sometimes we have them, often we don’t. And they never seem to last for long. But at a level far deeper than our feelings: in the depths of our souls, in the farthest reaches of our hearts, the Holy Spirit has been quietly working wonders of grace, making us different even if we don’t feel different.

I suspect that after the dramatic events of Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus did feel different. How else to explain the way they burst forth from the locked safety of the Upper Room and began to preach? But I would still maintain that the greatest change that took place in those once-timid cowards was not at the level of their feelings but at the deepest level of their being. That’s got them over the long haul once the fires of Pentecost had cooled.

So what about feelings? Do they have a place? They do, of course. Why else would we be so intent on engaging the senses in everything we do? Why use water, oil, bread and wine? Why light candles and burn incense? Why build churches with beautiful music and art? Why gather in them Sunday after Sunday, allowing the beauty of it all to wash over us, anointing our spirits and lifting our hearts? For a time, at least --- maybe for only a blessed moment --- our

feelings are engaged and we do feel different, and we gain what we need in order to believe when belief comes hard, to hope when there seems little enough to hope for, to love when we don't feel very loving or very loved, to pray when God seems pretty far away.

It strikes me that I may have just described what the Church likes to call "Ordinary Time." Most of our faith lives are lived out in "Ordinary Time" against a fairly routine and predictable landscape. And, of course, Pentecost ushers us into Ordinary Time which will run all the way from now until Advent. So my question is: come Advent, when the long weeks of Ordinary Time have come to an end, will we be any different? Not FEEL any different but BE any different? Will we be any stronger, holier, more grounded in our faith? Will we be more caring for one another, more compassionate, more understanding? Will we be more alive and active in the way we pray? Will we be more committed to the poor, more passionate in advocating for justice, more aware of all the things that our Baptism calls us to?

Pentecost is the right day to ask such questions and the right day to try to answer them, too. The Spirit unleashed on the infant Church at Pentecost still works wonders, still lights fires, still shakes foundations.

May the Holy Spirit whom God has been breathing into us ever since the day of our Baptism touch us at the deepest core of our being and, through us, may that Spirit continue to "renew the face of the earth!"