

Homily – The Many Voices of the Holy Spirit

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I like having many preaching voices here at St. Barnabas. If you have been with us over the last few months, beside me, you have heard Dcn. Susan and Todd and Doug and Ken and Julie and Gerti and the Bishop. I like many voices because I think the Holy Spirit has many voices, and we need to make room for many voices. We need to allow many voices in preaching, many voices in theology, and many voices in the variety of ways we can be the hands and feet and voice of Jesus here in the South County.

While we have many voices, one of the common experiences of preaching is that it is a spiritual experience. Deeply exploring a Bible passage or topic is a spiritual experience. Writing and editing the words of the homily is a spiritual experience that is very dependent on the Holy Spirit. Standing in front of you and saying the words is a very public spiritual experience in which one is sharing feelings and experiences that are often private and personal. Preaching is spiritual. The sharing of a voice is spiritual.

And let's not forget the variety of preaching styles. Remember the royal wedding Harry and Megan. Our Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Michael Curry, preached at the royal wedding in Windsor, and his style of preaching is in the great tradition of black preachers, delivered in a loose, improvisational style. Some of the facial expressions from the royal family were priceless when they heard Bishop Michael preach. And, I can assure you that the Holy Spirit is going to have to work especially hard before you see me be able to preach in that style.

Now we have many voices or preachers here at St. Barnabas, but this is made even more exciting since even one speaker can have many voices. There are various ways that an individual can craft a homily. One common way is to focus on the Gospel passage, to pull the passage apart, explain its words, its context and some of the history of its use and application to everyday life. One can use this same technique with the other Scripture readings of the day, though this is less frequently done with our Psalm of the day. However, as I demonstrated two weeks ago, even the Psalm can become the focus of a homily and I spoke about embodied spirituality.

Another way to craft a homily or sermon is to focus on a topic. The topic may be an obscure tangent from one of the readings, or it can be a common theme across several of the readings. One can review the history of the topic, and one can use theology, psychology and sociology to look at the topic from various angles. The topic of the homily is then applied and made relevant to our everyday lives. At its best the

topic will help us in our individual spiritual lives or in the communal life that we share together.

And, sometimes it is appropriate to craft and share a homily on a topic that comes from outside the day's Scripture readings. Mother's Day, some of our patriotic holidays, the Feast of St. Francis, and All Saints Day are four examples. World events, especially tragic ones, are also fair game for sermons. There are lots of ways to craft a homily and the challenge is to always make the sermon relevant to the lived lives of the people who are hearing it.

So, when you arrive here on Sunday, you almost never know what voice you are going to hear. That is part of the beauty we have here at St. Barnabas. At the same time part of the challenge is that you all are in different places on your spiritual journey. This means that some homilies are going to hit home; some sermons are going to remind you of places you once had been on your journey; and sometimes you will recognize the relevance of the message for a loved one. If this last part is true, then you should remember to share the message with your loved one. You can find a copy of the sermon on our St. Barnabas website, or just summarize it with your own words.

And sometimes, the words you hear just don't stick or don't seem personally relevant to you. The words may be hitting home for someone else, but not for you. I think you will all agree that this happens – sometimes.

Today is our annual celebration of Pentecost. As we heard in today's readings, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to be with his followers. Two thousand years ago, Jesus departs from his followers but he ensures that his followers continue to feel the embrace and guidance of God. God is always present, but through the tongues of fire and the sudden understanding of multiple languages, Jesus made sure his followers had a tactile and memorable experience of that presence.

Of note, we should always remember that the Holy Spirit was not new on that day two thousand years ago. Like Christ, the Holy Spirit has been across the universe for all of eternity. However, that day in Jerusalem was a turning point for the followers of Jesus. They knew the Holy Spirit was present with them, just as we are to know the Holy Spirit is here with us today.

Now, historically, the Holy Spirit has played a larger, more significant role in the theology and daily life of the Orthodox churches. How many of you have experience with the Orthodox Churches? Experience, and especially experience through the Holy Spirit, continued to play a larger role in the east where mystical experience of God was encouraged and expected. To this day, the Orthodox churches continue to "speak

about the Holy Spirit as effecting deification, perfection, adoption, and sanctification” or in other words theosis. Theosis means that through the acceptance of the Holy Spirit, human beings are capable of reaching upwards toward God and empowered to become more like Jesus. Isn’t that something you would like? I find it comforting to know that the Holy Spirit is available to help us be more like Jesus.

And how many of you have experience with the Roman Catholic church? The Roman Catholic view of the Holy Spirit has been shifting in the last fifty years. Vatican II initiated a new sensitivity to role of the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God not only through the sacraments and the church ministries but also through special charisms bestowed freely on all the faithful in a variety of ways.”

And, how many of you have experience with the Lutheran churches? For Martin Luther, “the Holy Spirit is the spirit of sanctification distinct from the Father of creation and the Son of redemption.” Luther “differentiates two ways God approaches us: the ‘outer’ way: through the preached Word and sacraments, and the ‘inner’ way through the Holy Spirit and her gifts.”

And, how many of you have experience with any of the Pentecostal churches? With its start in 1906 at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles and its incredible worldwide growth, the Pentecostal movement has reached a Christian membership size that is only second to the Roman Catholic tradition. “The Pentecostals envision a world subject to invasions by the supernatural elements. Claims of signs, wonders, and miracles are not limited to Sunday morning. They are to be a part of daily life.” Spirit baptism, signified by speaking in tongues, is a central tenant of the Pentecostal tradition.

Now for some of you this brief trip through the various denominational views was a way for you to grapple with this thing that we call the Holy Spirit. History lessons and a review of doctrine can be very helpful for some. For others of you the more casual review of the way the Spirit can be working through many preaching voices was a way for you to recognize some things about the Holy Spirit. Here is my third attempt to provide something meaningful. I have to admit sometimes preaching is like throwing spaghetti against the wall to see what will stick or be remembered.

Here is attempt number three. For me, history and human society keeps moving forward with ever-new creativity. I am an optimist and for me our history has been two steps forward and one step back – two steps forward and one step back. Look at what’s happened just in the last century! For all of the horrible wars, injustice, and sin, both personal and systemic, the immense advances in consciousness, science, technology, and awareness are astounding.

However, we did not do achieve this movement by ourselves. I believe these advances emerge from the Holy Spirit, who never gives up on this creation and our humanity. The Holy Spirit is our implanted hope. Conversely, when God as Holy Spirit is missing, there's no inner momentum. There is no inner corrective, no inner aliveness.

When the Spirit is alive in people, they wake up from their mechanical thinking and enter the realm of co-creative power. Like Pinocchio, we move from wooden to real. We transform from hurt people hurting other people to wounded healers healing others. Not just individually, but history itself keeps moving forward in this mighty move of Spirit unleashed. The primary arc we see through all of the Bible and throughout all of human history is the way the Holy Spirit continues to reach out to us and guide us forward. It is the Spirit in history that seems to be driving us, not giving up on us.

I think one thing we love so much about young children is their indomitable hope, curiosity, and desire to grow. They fall down, and soon they're all grins again. The Indwelling Spirit is this constant ability of humanity to keep going, to keep recovering from its wounds, to keep hoping and trying again My prayer is that we can each be like a child. May the Holy Spirit be alive within you so that you will always keep smiling, despite every setback. Isn't that the joy you want.

Now, as I end today, I have one last noodle to throw against the wall. In the pew rack in front of you is the red book of common prayer. Would you turn to page 852?

The Episcopal Church is not heavy on doctrine, but we do have this section of the Book of Common prayer that provides a little bit of a center to our theology. Catechisms are a set of principles that are often in the form of question and answer.

This is the section of the Catechism on the Holy Spirit. I will ask you each question, and would ask you to respond aloud with the answer.

Q. What is the Holy Spirit?

A. The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, God at work in the world and in the Church even now.

Q. How is the Holy Spirit revealed in the Old Covenant?

A. The Holy Spirit is revealed in the Old Covenant as the giver of life, the One who spoke through the prophets.

Q. How is the Holy Spirit revealed in the New Covenant?

A. The Holy Spirit is revealed as the Lord who leads us into all truth and enables us to grow in the likeness of Christ.

Q. How do we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

A. We recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit when we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are brought into love and harmony with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation.

Q. How do we recognize the truths taught by the Holy Spirit?

A. We recognize truths to be taught by the Holy Spirit when they are in accord with the Scriptures.

Come Holy Spirit Come. And fill this place, and fill our hearts, and fill our homes.

Parts of the homily are based on our taken from Richard Rohr's book, The Divine Dance.