

A recent newspaper article chronicled the story of a husband and wife celebrating their 75<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. For our purposes, we'll call them Joseph and Mary. In response to the question about their meeting and falling in love, Mary, after describing barn dance that was the setting, stated, “Dancing with Joe I was swept me off my feet as he gazed into my eyes. I just knew he was the one I wanted to journey with for the rest of my life.” Responding to the reporter’s question of how they have kept the love between them strong, Joseph replied, “We never let the flame of our love go out. Oh, there were times when it got a little dim now and then, but we knew we were there for each other. You just can’t take love for granted. You’ve got to work at it every day.”

Pentecost celebrates God’s falling in love with us and our response. In our first reading from the Book of Acts we hear the traditional Pentecost story. Those disciples and Mary the mother of Jesus gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem that Sunday were “swept off their feet.” God’s Spirit that swept down upon them would carry them to all the known corners of the world of their day. Likewise those gathered experienced God’s love burning inside of them. Like a flame, they could not keep the light and intensity of this good news to themselves. It had to be shared. The apostle Peter’s proclamation about Jesus was understood by the people gathered for the Pentecost feast from throughout the world despite the fact that all spoke different languages. The language of love is a universal one. Over time, the fire of this initial experience would be tested, would grow dim only to glow bright again as the apostles and the first Christians faced opposition, persecution and, for many, martyrdom for their faith. Yet, they persevered. Acts tells us they turned always in prayer to the Holy Spirit who continued to supply them with all that was necessary to complete their mission.

Today on what is traditionally referred to as the “birthday of the church” or its “anniversary” God renews his love for us through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus in today’s gospel reminds us that the Holy Spirit is the means by which his presence and work “remain” through the divine indwelling. The Holy Spirit of Jesus and the Father comes and makes his “dwelling” within each of us. Dwelling within us, the Holy Spirit continues to teach us God’s love and remind us of all that Jesus revealed. St. Paul in today’s second reading proclaims we are no longer of the flesh, that is to say, our life is no longer defined or confined by the strictures of the world, but given the Spirit’s indwelling we already possess that life we call “heaven”—union with God, making us the “children of God” now, even as what that life will look like in glory is still being worked out (I Jn. 3:1-3).

Pentecost invites us to allow the Spirit to “sweep us off our feet” and enflame us with divine love, and like those apostles of old, and the apostles in our families and parishes who passed on the faith and formed us, to take up our share of responsibility of carrying the gospel to the people and situations to which the Spirit transports us. How can or does this happen? Think for a moment of a time when someone happened to just “burst” into your life through an unexpected visit, a phone call, a text or tweet with a word or gesture that affirmed you in your trouble or expanded your joy. Or perhaps you did something similar for someone else. If this has happened to any of us, we’ve been “swept off our feet” by the Holy Spirit, our words and gestures a flaming polyglot of language proclaiming God’s love. These are Pentecost moments.

Of course, we’ve got to desire it, to continually work at it to deepen it. But it is always there. This is who God is. God is Love. Happy Pentecost!