

*Sermon for the Day of Pentecost, 15.v.2005, 10:30 a.m.
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle/Brogue, Pennsylvania
Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:25-35,37; I Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 20:19-23
Holy Communion, LBW - Setting 2*

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

Today being the Feast of Pentecost, our Wednesday morning Bible class had a discussion, as we studied the lessons for the coming Sunday, about the ways in which God the Holy Spirit is depicted in Christian art. The most common of these is not directly related to the Day of Pentecost at all.

When Our Lord was baptized by His cousin John at the Jordan River, all four Gospels agree in saying that the heavens opened, the voice of God the Father was heard, affirming Jesus as His Son, and that the Spirit of God was seen to descend on Jesus in bodily form, 'like a dove.' The most common visual depiction of God the Holy Spirit comes from this account, one of those important places in the New Testament where all four Gospels are in exact agreement. If you are able to turn around and look to the right of the West Altar, you will see this depiction. This is not exactly the way a dove lands, but it

is easier to show the dove in a nose dive than to depict all the detail of the dove gliding to a gentle stop by applying its air brakes, flapping backwards with landing gear down.

Our home seems to have become more of a mourning dove sanctuary than ever this year. Whether our putting out millet in quantity or our efforts to help rescue fledgling doves who have not quite mastered the knack of flying have had anything to do with this, I do not know. I do know that they are wonderful creatures, a fitting symbol the world over for peace. Now that one of the several mourning dove couples has claimed the front portico of our house for their nesting site, we not only see them at close range but we also hear the amazing range of sounds they make beyond the distant, mournful sing for which they are named. They not only sing but also cluck and coo in a variety of ways. My favorite dove sound is the one I hear as they alight, the sound of a gentle wind caused by their wings.

If you can try to hear that sound of the dove's descent when you see the visual image of this beautiful creature, then your mind and heart will be brought closer to the amazing scene Saint Luke

portrays in Acts. The *wind* of God's Spirit active in history is harder to depict, as is the passion to communicate the Good News of God's mercy and forgiveness in Jesus Christ, 'tongues as of fire' overcoming all barriers of language or nationality or culture. The dove of Jesus' Baptism and the flaming tongues of Pentecost can be depicted visually, but the *wind* of the Holy Spirit, the unseen and power of God's activity in the world, can only be heard and felt, like the sound and the rush of air caused by the dove coming to rest from flight. The best and only image for the wind of God's Spirit I know of in Christian art is that of the Church as a ship with a single sail. The sail is the sacred page of God's Word in Scripture. The wind that drives the ship is the Holy Spirit.

For that reason, it is better to reflect on what God the Holy Spirit *does*, and, if we need a visual image, to let *that* be the focus of our thought and devotion. It is because of the *action* of the Holy Spirit, that thousands of Christian hospitals have been named for the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. An example is Holy Spirit Hospital in Harrisburg. Hospitals under the patronage of the Holy Spirit are quite common in Europe, in Latin America, in the parts of Asia

belonging to Russia and, in Christian Africa, in Israel and, where there still are Christian institutions permitted by the Muslim majority, elsewhere in the Middle East.

This practice was started, I believe, by the crusading order of the Knights of Saint John Hospitalers, a fighting, praying and healing order of priests and laymen—many of them learned physicians and surgeons—dedicated to defending the Holy Land and all pilgrims and defenseless persons everywhere. The Hospitalers built and maintained refuge chapels over sources of water along all pilgrimage routes, protecting the defenseless against enemies and roving criminals. In the Holy Land, their hospitals of the Holy Spirit treated both Christian and Saracen wounded alike. Their patients were fed and their thirst quenched with vessels of gold plate, for, the Knights of St. John maintained, they were called to serve Christ when He is sick or dying in every man.

So, when I think of God the Holy Spirit and stop to lift my heart and mind to Him in prayer, I think of hospitals and nurses, of doctors and laboratory technicians and researchers, of surgeons and hospital housekeepers, all of whom do difficult, dirty and physically

exhausting work to serve the dignity of those from whom illness has often snatched away the last vestiges of dignity. In the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City, these forms of Spirit-filled service are all depicted in the windows of that great church. Here we have room only for our one dove window, but in your mind and heart there is room enough to think of all of the works of mercy to which God moves men and women each day.

What would be the picture of the life toward which God's Spirit is moving *you* look like? Indeed, some of you share the ministry of those Christian Hospitalers, keeping vigil early or late by the sick beds of patients in our hospitals and nursing homes or in their homes. But every wise kind and helpful word of friendship or good counsel, every act whereby we support one another in this life and every honest and useful work, trade and profession dedicated to the upbuilding of the human community is also of the same Spirit Who brought order out of chaos in God's creation and Who created the human beings and all living things *for* one another. What does work of the Holy Spirit look like in your life? What does patience and mercy, understanding and forgiveness look like? Picture the face

of the person you need to forgive, or that of the person whose forgiveness you need to believe, for there is no proclamation and hearing of the Gospel than that. There, in that moment, you will surely hear feel the rush of a gentle wind that could change your life and that of others for God's purpose.

Let us pray: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful, and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. ✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit both now and forever. ✠ Amen.

S. D. G. !