



Gift of the Spirit

The Bigger Picture of Pentecost

By Daniel S. Mulhall

There are four accounts in Scripture that describe the apostles after Jesus' ascension.

– Matthew 28:19 has the apostles going forth to make disciples of all nations.

– Mark 16:20 says that the apostles “went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs” sending them throughout the world proclaiming “eternal salvation.”

– Luke 24:52-53 says the apostles returned to Jerusalem proclaiming Jesus and praising God in the temple.

– And the most detailed presentation is found in Acts 1 and 2, which describes the election of a new apostle to replace Judas Iscariot and the effects of the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

In each of these four passages, the followers of Jesus are seen as strong, courageous and determined messengers. They have no doubt that they have been charged by Jesus to proclaim the good news to the world.

Nowhere after the ascension is there any indication that they

were afraid to appear in public, and we see that the coming of the Holy Spirit gave them the courage to take up Jesus' mission. What Acts tells us is that when the tongues of fire came to rest on them, they became able to speak languages they did not know.

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Gift of the Spirit: Courage for the Journey

By David Gibson

Decision-making can be frightening. After all, big decisions can alter the course of people's lives – for the better or for the worse. So, it takes strength and even courage to make decisions on matters of consequence.

People shy away from making some decisions, even those that might yield great rewards for them and those they care about most. I am thinking, for example, of the kinds of decisions that promise to set a sort of journey into motion, one that promises to lead a family, a community or a group of friends to a better place in their lives.

Of course, sometimes people need to make these kinds of decisions together.

One type of real-life journey starts with a decision to take steps to revivify a relationship that is suffering greatly from neglect, misunderstandings or hurtful words and actions.

Another life-altering decision might lead to a profound career change. Perhaps this will mean leaving a secure position that is unrewarding personally in order to move in the direction of a happier, more fulfilling future for oneself and one's family.

A very difficult but life-altering decision is witnessed when a mother and father conclude that they must take steps to become the parents their teenagers actually need, but perhaps actually have not had lately.

What usually lurks just beneath the surface when the time arrives to make a life-altering decision is the apprehension that instead of making things better it will make things worse. This is where courage, which is not the same as foolish boldness, comes into play.

It is worth remembering that Christian tradition regards fortitude, or courage, as a gift of the Holy Spirit. So, strength holds an authentic place in Christian spirituality. It is not uncommon to petition God for strength and courage.



What does it mean to put the gift of strength or courage into action? In challenging situations

that becomes a key question for Christian reflection, meditation, conversation and prayer.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, his apostles looked to the Holy Spirit as the source of the strength and courage needed to fulfill their mission. The Acts of the Apostles describes the first Christians being filled with the Spirit and thus speaking "the word of God with boldness" (4:31), while also being "filled with joy" (13:52).

The qualities of people who make "life-changing decisions" can include "a willingness to keep trying despite what most of us would call unbearably difficult human circumstances," Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas, suggested in a February 2015 speech. He described decisions that encompass risk and set a life journey into motion.

Harsh criticism of the decisions such people make is not rare, Bishop Flores thought. Their decisions may be viewed "with a kind of" condescension and considered "reckless."

Those the bishop had in mind were immigrants who made the decision to undertake a journey from Central America to the United States. His speech viewed these people in largely theological and spiritual terms, discussing "the reality" of their

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lives "from the perspective of the faith of the church."

Bishop Flores told of meeting a 16-year-old Honduran boy in Central America who had attempted at least five times, unsuccessfully, to journey to the United States. The youth's goals were simple: a life, a family, the joy of companionship.

"We should be amazed that a 16-year-old has the self-possession to take responsibility for his life and try to cross the interior of Mexico in hopes of finding something better," Bishop Flores commented. He said, "I know a lot of 16-year-olds who struggle to make a decision about whether to go to school in the morning."

What needs to be acknowledged about immigrants is their quality of self-possession, the bishop proposed. Also remarkable, he suggested, are all those who pursue a difficult, painful journey without succumbing to "fatalism, paralysis or to dishonorable means." The decision these people make is not due only to the unbearable circumstances in which they live, said Bishop Flores. "They move because they are intelligent beings endowed with free will and self-movement." He added, "There is an unspeakably great dignity in this

expression of self-possession."

Pope Francis often mentions the courage needed to undertake life's important journeys. "It takes courage to form a family," he once told a gathering of young people. He advised on another occasion that "it is important to have the courage to ask for forgiveness when we are at fault in the family."

Pope Francis even speaks of having "the courage to be happy."

Courage and strength are essential for anyone who wants to journey further into the Christian mystery and live it, the pope indicated in his 2015 Easter Vigil homily in St. Peter's Basilica. Entering the mystery means "going beyond our own comfort zone" and not being "afraid of reality," he stressed.

For Pope Francis, entering the Christian mystery means "seeking a deeper meaning, an answer, and not an easy one, to the questions that challenge our faith, our fidelity and our very existence."

David Gibson was a member of the Catholic News Service editorial staff for 37 years.