June 9, 2019
Pentecost Sunday (C)
Readings: Acts 2:1-11; Ps 104:1, 24, 29-31, 34; 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23

By Dianne Bergant, CSA

Look what blew into town! Though unconventional, this is certainly a valid way of describing the event of Pentecost. We believe that the Holy Spirit is the mysterious, dynamic power of God operative in the world today. And what is that power attempting to accomplish? Transformation. Transformation - not merely of the chrysalis into a butterfly, or an acorn into an oak, but transformation of vulnerable selfish people into courageous generous individuals. The Spirit of God is surely a Spirit of transformation. How else might we explain why “Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, Inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia,” people from Honduras, Chile, and Mexico, immigrants from the Ukraine, the Congo, and Sierra Leone all come together to hear of the mighty acts of God. When the Spirit of God blew into town, all God’s people came along on its mighty currents.

Today’s feast might be called the Feast of Unity. The first reading is certainly an example of this. People from all nations, people with different cultures and concerns came to Jerusalem to celebrate one feast – the Pentecost of the Jews, only to be drawn into another feast – the Pentecost of the Spirit. It should be noted that they were not required to surrender their cultural identity; they heard the ‘good news’ in their own tongues. Cultural diversity was not - nor is it today - a threat to unity.

This is also a Feast of Service of others. The reading from 1 Corinthians illustrates this. The power of the Spirit of God works in each of us in different ways. Some of us are teachers or bankers, or clerks. Others are politicians or Lyft drivers, or lawyers. Still others fix cars or broken bones. We can all be of service to others, and we can all graciously accept the service of others. There are so many different ways of transforming the universe.

Finally, this is also a Feast of Forgiveness. The gospel passage describes this. The sacrament of Reconciliation is not the only avenue of forgiveness. There is in the life of each of us ample opportunity for forgiveness. People disappoint us, and we disappoint them. They often sin against us, and we sin against them. Such rancor is too heavy to carry into the future when we have a universe to transform. True forgiveness lightens the load.

Today’s cosmologists tell us that we are part of an evolving universe. We don’t just live in it; we are a living breathing part of it. What happens to the universe happens to us; what happens to us happens to the universe. And that includes all of us. Today’s ecotheologians claim that the
power that drives that evolving is the power of God, the Spirit of God. That Spirit is moving the entire universe to its transformation – and we are part of that movement to transformation. Just think of that for a moment. The integrity with which we live our lives, the care we show to those for whom we are responsible, the honesty with which we carry on business with others all serves to transform the universe. As we learned as children: ‘Every little bit counts.’ Grab hold of the Spirit!

Dianne Bergant, CSA, is Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP Distinguished Professor Emerita of Old Testament Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.