

PENTECOST
“Pickled Eggs & Grave Stones”
May 27, 2007, Grace Church, Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close

Today is the Feast of Pentecost. It is the great celebration of the Church when we welcome the gift of the Holy Spirit. What a coincidence that it's memorial Weekend! This is not a bad thing ... it is good. This is a teaching moment that is reinforced by the holiday weekend. 50 days ago we celebrated the Resurrection of Jesus Christ with Easter. 10 days ago we celebrated Jesus' ascending into heaven with the Feast of the Ascension. Once again, it's a time of transition. What are we to make of it all?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is talking with his disciples. We hear him telling the disciples to prepare for a transition. There are changes coming. He tells them to live by the love commandment. He tells them to serve and forgive. He tells them to remember the unique relationship he has with God. During Easter, Jesus appears to the disciples, but again, it preparing them for something else. Now the Ascension has taken place. Jesus is lifted up into heaven to be at the right hand of God. He's gone! The disciples once more are left scratching their heads. Now what? What was it that Jesus said? He was sending an advocate?

What's an advocate? If we ask one of our lawyer friends in the parish, they will tell us an advocate is someone who speaks on behalf and for the benefit of another. It is someone who is on our side. Think about who is on our side. Most often parents come to mind. Then there are teachers who advocate for us. If we have a new job or are an apprentice, an advocate is our mentor or the one who helps us get the job done.

The two things that speak loudly to us today from John are that the Holy Spirit comes to teach us and to remind us. These are the two principle functions of the advocate that Jesus sends. The Holy Spirit reminds us about God and Jesus. It reminds us what it means to be a faith community. The Holy Spirit comes to teach us. It teaches us what our responsibility, as Jesus followers are to be: embracing the love commandment; offering hospitality; living as community; sharing forgiveness and telling the story about God and Jesus.

We can be struck especially by this attribute of remind that Holy Spirit performs. We are a community. We are called to share. We are called to serve. We are called to continue Jesus' ministry. Think about how many times we have to remind our kids about things in general. The Holy Spirit works in that way with us. We have to be reminded over and over what it means to be a Christian, that god is intimately involved in our lives and that Jesus is the way of truth, peace and life.

Let's just shift for a moment. What is Memorial Weekend? It has become the unofficial start of summer. We're a little lighter in attendance this morning as people take advantage of the long weekend to head to the Jersey shore! According to the fashion police, it's okay now to wear white shoes and seersucker clothes. The food stores have geared up for the cookouts that mark this weekend. And there are the sales ... ah yes! The sales! We can purchase a wealth of things, most of which we probably don't need, at discount and sale prices! Is this what Memorial Weekend is all about? How did it get started? What was it meant to be?

What is Memorial weekend for you? When I was a boy, I spent this weekend with one set of grandparents or the others. If I was at my mother's family, there was the family reunion and food! My mom was the oldest of 16 so there were always great crowds for these festivals! The

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food is what I remember most: pickled eggs, icicle pickles, glorified rice and strawberry-rhubarb pie! It was fun, food and softball games. If I was with my father's family, it was different. This was the weekend we went to the cemetery in Elmira, New York. We would clean the gravestones and put fresh cut flowers out. For the veterans, there would be flags put out. There was my grandfather who served in WWI and my dad who served in WWII. In another cemetery, the family plot has the Civil War vet. In another cemetery, there are the Revolutionary War veterans. This was a weekend that we remembered them. We told the stories and honored them.

Isn't that what Memorial Weekend was meant to be? It was designed to be a time when we used our memory to remember ... that these people made the ultimate sacrifice for our benefit. Tomorrow there will be Memorial Day parades. But the crowds are shrinking and much of the original meaning of this weekend has disappeared. Who will teach us and who will remind us of what this time means? Without teaching and reminding, any holiday will become something less than what it was meant to be.

Now we can shift back to the fate and life of our Church. It is the Holy Spirit that teaches and reminds us. The Spirit comes into our lives and helps us to take up the ministry of Jesus Christ where he left off! We are told that it will bring peace ... that we don't have to be afraid. The Spirit helps us to BE THE CHURCH!

This is the birth of the Church! What do we get on our birthdays? We get a party, we get cake and ice cream ... and we get gifts! The gift we get today is the Holy Spirit. It comes direct from Jesus himself. It comes to be our advocate, our teacher and our guide. The Spirit helps us to become what God wants! This is a day to celebrate! The Spirit will meet us where we are and help us to move to where God wants us to be! May we open ourselves to the power and wonder of this great gift from God. May we pick up where Jesus left off and be the community of God in this time and this place ... may we be the Church! Amen!