The Birthday of the Church

This Sunday we celebrate Pentecost, the third major holy day in the Church. Pentecost is the day of the Holy Spirit, the day when God came to earth in the form of spirit, like fire and flame, breath and wind. The Church often celebrates Pentecost as its birthday when the Spirit filled the people with courage, power and gifts, and people started prophesying, speaking in different languages and understanding one another.

Filled and emboldened by the Spirit, the disciples started preaching and baptizing those who followed the Jesus way. People devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. They did wonders and miracles. They shared what they had, sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. They ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God. And, they grew in number. This is the story in Acts 2nd.

Many of us are jealous of such churches. Growing in number shows church vitality and energy, we think. We live in a culture that often reminds us that "the bigger is always better." Yet, Church vitality is not always about numbers, it is not about the good old days for which many seem to be nostalgic, nor is it about an eternal future on earth.

The definition of vitality is - the ability to live, grow and develop. Vitality is the state of being strong, active and energetic. The word itself is derived from "vita" or "life." This vitality refers to feeling healthy, engaged and energetic, as well as living with purpose and meaning. Energy is at the core of vitality. Any living thing that has no energy is teetering between life and death.

The Holy Spirit is the church's energy. She is the fire, the wind, the wisdom of the church. Without Her there is no Church.

Church vitality, like Church growth, is not an object, but a byproduct, a result, an outcome of health and wellbeing. One cannot buy church vitality nor achieve it by strategic planning or visioning, as important as they may be. There are no quick fixes, or one-size-fits-all processes for vitality. Church vitality is the byproduct of health and wellbeing. Healthy churches are usually vital churches no matter their size. And, health and wellbeing, among other things, involve a balanced diet and nutrition, (input and output), movement and exercise, sleep and rest, enriching relationships and collaboration.

On this Pentecost Sunday when we celebrate the birthday of the church, we remember that Jesus birthed a movement, and the Spirit birthed the Church. We also remember that not only annually but each day we are called to open ourselves to the movement and the breath of the Holdy Spirit. Instead of worrying about Church Vitality which in our minds is often connected to size and the presence of younger people, why not pay attention to church health, energy and wellbeing?

Does our church have proper, balanced nutrition, energy input and output – ministry within and without, a variety of perspectives on faith and theology, the energy of the Holy Spirit?

Does our church move and exercise? Does it like new adventure and learning or it is sedentary and very comfortable in the status quo and how things are?

Does our church have enriching relationships and healthy connections where every part of the body is clear about their position and role, where all parts bring their diverse gifts and the whole community benefits?

Does our church have a realistic perspective especially concerning its lifespan and calling?

Health and wellbeing do not guarantee life eternal on earth. Every living thing on this planet has a lifespan. Churches are no different. As living communities, churches have a life span and a time to live or die. Yet throughout the years, the faith has endured as the Church has changed forms.

Dying is not always a bad thing. Out of death comes resurrection and new life. That is the promise of our faith as we open ourselves to the fire and the wind of the Holy Spirit.

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