

Pentecost – June 3-4, 2017 – Reflection

“The water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of living water, welling up into eternal life.” (John 4)

“But why did Christ call the grace of the Spirit water? Because all things are dependent on water ... water comes down from heaven as rain, and though it is always the same in itself, it produces many different effects ... throughout the whole of creation.” (St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

I was in my early thirties before I ever made it as far south as Florida. It was the late eighties when I and some friends flew to Fort Lauderdale for a post-Easter beach getaway. As we were driving down the strip and looking at all the sights, I made my friend pull the rental car over to the side of the road. I jumped out and ran up to a tree. I'm sure my friends thought I was having some sorta hallucinogenic flashback from the sixties, but I had never seen a palm tree up close and personal. They were nothing like the oaks and maples and pines I was used to up north. Palm trees looked like they were constructed for movie sets; they looked artificial. I wanted to get close to one to touch it, feel that it was real. I was like a little kid on my first Christmas discovering the magic ... and no, I didn't get bonked on the head by a falling coconut ... thought that WOULD explain a lot, wouldn't it??

The Holy Spirit, whose coming upon the Church at Pentecost we celebrate today, rains God's grace and gifts upon the Body of Christ, in

all her members. Like the rain, the Spirit is the same to everyone, for everyone. But, as in nature, the rain causes an acorn to grow into an oak or a cone to grow into Christmas tree or a cocoanut to grow into a palm tree, so in us, in the Church, the grace of the Spirit poured out upon us causes very different manifestations. One becomes a teacher of truth; another a prophet to speak to a particular age. One person's intellect is watered so that he becomes a wise interpreter of sacred scripture, while another can heal or cast out demons. There may be one person who is passionate for love in service, while another finds God in prayer and silence. The Spirit falls on one who becomes a missionary, while another brings a child into the world and raises that child to holiness and love for God. And it is the same Spirit who gives to some the courage to be graceful in suffering, even to the point of watering the earth with their blood, planting the seed for new Christians to grow.

The hymn cries out in joy and hope, "Rain down, rain down, rain down Your love on Your people; rain down, rain down, rain down Your love, God of life." If we open ourselves to God's presence in our lives in patient, prayerful waiting and in service to God's people, the Spirit will pour down upon us God's grace and we will be filled to overflowing, and the gifts that grow in us will renew the face of the earth.

But, if we persist in going it alone, congratulate ourselves on doing it "my way", find ourselves too busy, too rushed, too distracted, too noisy to listen for the whisper of God, we will stay just as we are: an acorn that never becomes an oak, a cone that never pushes branches to the sky, a cocoanut that never sways in the tropical breeze, a tree that never grows because it has planted itself in an arid desert of self-sufficiency. If we shelter ourselves from the warm and gentle rain of

the Spirit's grace and gifts, we remain what we are, never to become what we could be: just a nut, but never a tree.