Spirituality
Scripture for Life
Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



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by Sr. Mary M. McGlone

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Our Liturgy of the Word for the Vigil of Pentecost begins by restating the Genesis myth of the Fall in a different context. This time, instead of an uppity couple ruining the tranquility of a garden, Genesis 11 portrays the paradise of a united humanity that knows no divisions of geography, language or anything else. Then they decide that they'll "make a name" for themselves. (Before whom? They were one people — until some took the lead, expecting others to obey.)

Competition sprang up among them along with inequality and resistance to diversity. More than that, they cultivated the assumption that they could improve on God's plans.

Using vocabulary reminiscent of Israel's slave labor in Egypt (Exodus 1:14), we hear that they built a tower, molding bricks and using bitumen for mortar, all in an attempt to control life and attain access to the heavens on their own power. The result was babbling Babel.

Pentecost Sunday at the Vigil Mass

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Genesis 11:1-9
Psalm 104
Romans 8:22-27
John 7:37-39

They created a situation in which they could not trust one another. Striving to outdo each other, they could no longer speak the one language of a united people.

Like the story of the Garden of Eden and the murder of Abel, this account gives another explanation of the origins of evil and the seemingly invincible divisions among Earth's people. Jesus' mission was to heal these divisions, revealing the union with God and neighbor that humanity was created to enjoy.

Responding to this predicament, Jesus describes the salvation he offers as living water, the source of life. Conjuring memories of the encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well (John 4), this image describes God's ongoing offer to give life, to let divine life flow through us.

First, Jesus cries out, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink!"

In a land where water was scarcer than an oft-limited food, this represented a very concrete promise of life. The image of living water complements the image of the vine and branches, inviting us to contemplate how Christ can be our sustenance and refreshment, inviting us into the kind of union that happens as drops of water come together and begin to flow as one.

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Paul puts great emphasis on the idea that the Spirit in us is an experience of grace and hope, not an ambition or a project. Hope in the Spirit puts us in a stance of vulnerable trust, believing that more is on the horizon than we could ever imagine. Thus, even our prayer becomes a work of the Spirit within us, a wordless, imageless longing for what only God can provide, the living water that is life for all in Christ.

The liturgy for the Vigil of Pentecost invites us into hope. Unlike the miracle of the tongues we will hear the next day, this is an invitation to dream, as theologian John Haught would say, to "lean on the future," to allow God's future to beckon us forth.

This is the evolutionary hope Paul offers, not for what we see, but that for which we are willing to wait with patience and endurance.

This feast invites us to walk in humility so that God can continue to create through and for us. It reminds us that the Christian journey is not a return to a perfect past, but an experience of wayfaring with Abraham into the risky, mysterious future that can come about only when we trust God more than our own hopes and plans.

Who can imagine what it will be like as living water continues to flow through us?

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