

**Pentecost 2007 (C) May 27, 2007**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**Vigil: Joel 3:1-5;**

**Psalm 104:1-2, 24, 27-30, 35;**

**Romans 8:22-27; John 7:37-39**

**Sunday: Acts 2:1-11;**

**Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-31, 34;**

**Romans 8:8-17;**

**John 14:15-16, 23-26**

## *Let the Word go forth.*

If I had to name one of the most quoted speeches of the 20th century, one near the top of my list would be the inaugural address of John F. Kennedy in 1961.

On a cold and blustery Washington day, a young man stood before the world, coatless and hatless, and while the wind blew, he challenged all who heard and saw him to "ask not." "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

The phrase has become emblematic of Kennedy. It may well be the one great quote by which he will forever be remembered. I know in one way or another those words contributed toward me and members of my high school class entering the Peace Corps, seminaries and convents.

But earlier in that same speech, he alerted the world that "the torch had been passed to a new generation." And he began that statement with a grand declaration: "Let the word go forth." There is a missionary zeal in that phrase - and a kind of dignity and grace that you don't hear much in political speeches anymore. Let the word go forth.

It occurs to me, on this Solemnity of Pentecost, that those five words could also summon up the true meaning of this feast. For in the dramatic events of

that dramatic day, when the bewildered disciples poured into the streets, their purpose was exactly that: to let the Word go forth. Let the Word go forth...beyond the streets and alleys of Jerusalem, into the hill country of Judea and beyond. Let the Word go forth...across the blue waters of the Mediterranean, to Greece and Rome, to Africa and Spain. Let the Word go forth...into every continent, to be heard in every home, to be lived in every heart. And it all began on this day we celebrate, Pentecost.

It is astonishing to consider where Christ's Gospel has gone, and how far and wide it is preached. What began with a few frightened people in a darkened room in Jerusalem has spilled out and touched every corner of the globe. You'll find it in great, stained-glass cathedrals in Europe, in thatched huts in Asia, in hotel ballrooms and cruise ship dining rooms and hospital chapels from Bangkok to Brooklyn. It is spread in storefront churches and tiny private chapels, and even brought alive without any kind of church at all in the daily actions of believers everywhere. You'll find the Word preached in dozens of tongues - just as on that very first Pentecost - and understood in billions of hearts.

Our challenge today is to keep the Word going, to follow the mandate of those very first believers and let

the Word go forth. We do it every time we whisper a prayer for peace. We do it if we volunteer at a soup kitchen, or give to a clothing drive, or donate to missionaries overseas. We do it every time we choose to spend our Sunday mornings praising God instead of finishing the sports pages. We do it when a nurse holds the hand of a dying patient, or a wife holds the hand of a worried husband, or a stranger bends down to help an elderly woman collect a bag of groceries she's dropped. We do it when we support policies and politicians who embrace and nurture life from conception to natural death. We do it when we strive to love, to give, to guide, and to hope. We do it when we surrender our will to God's...and trust that it is the better way. We keep the flame of Pentecost burning when our greatest ambition is simply to be like Christ. Or, to borrow that famous phrase from President Kennedy, we do it when we ask not what God can do for us, but what we can do for God.

Two millennia ago, men and women who had followed Jesus asked themselves that question on the first Pentecost. And we are the beneficiaries of their answer. All of us who gather to pray and remember on this Pentecost are part of their legacy. They cleared the path, and often died trying, so that we would walk in their footsteps today.

So let us pray: "Fire us with your fire, O Spirit of God. May we shield nothing within us from your transforming fire. Breathe in us, inspire us; give us this week your Word for all whose lives we touch. We ask this through Christ our Lord."

*Let the Word go forth.*