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A universal kiss

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Among the mystics of past ages, it was not uncommon for God?s Holy Spirit to be referred to as God?s kiss. It could be said that on this feast of Pentecost, we celebrate the grace of being filled with the Spirit and, thereby, of being kissed by God.

John 20:19-23
Full text of the readings [1]

As Paul will tell us in his correspondence with the Corinthians, God?s kiss enables 13

the one kissed to profess faith in Jesus as Lord. That same Spirit kisses each member of the community and endows them with gifts. These gifts are meant to complement one another and to work in concert for the common gift. The kiss of God who is the Spirit also enables a community of diverse people to maintain an authentic unity among themselves, so that community is perceived as one integral body in Christ. It constitutes both a blessing and a challenge that we should celebrate this unity on this feast of the Spirit. This occasion prompts us to examine whether our unity is true or even possible.

Luke ably makes a case for the very real possibility of such unity in today?s first reading from Acts. In his narrative about the gift of the Spirit, it is clear that God?s gift was a universal one. As Eberhard Arnold has explained, it was not any one person who constituted the nascent church (*Innerland: A Guide into the Heart of the Gospel*, Plough Pub. House, 1999). Nor could the emergence of the church be attributed to heights of oratory; indeed, no degree of flaming oratory could have awakened for Christ the many who were moved at the time or produced the unity of the early church. The Spirit did not descend solely upon the speakers in such a way that they preached a sermon to an unenlightened crowd. On the contrary, flames as of fire ate their way into the hearts of the listeners as well, and enflamed all present in one common experience of the same Christ.

When the Spirit was sent forth by the risen Christ, all was overturned and set afire. Those who welcomed the Spirit were able to become a life-sharing community from whom love began to overflow. All were fired with the same burning love that drew them irresistibly together. Just as Jesus gathered his own to himself as friends, so the Spirit drew and can continue to draw Christians radically together.

But in order to avail ourselves of the power of the Spirit to make us one, we need to overcome our fears and come out from behind locked doors, as did the first disciples (Gospel, John). We need to remember the gifts that are ours to enjoy and then to disperse them in this world -- the gifts of Jesus? own peace, the ever-present breathing of his Spirit within all of us and the mandate of forgiveness that we are to realize. Some may object

that the Pentecostal power of the early church contrasts too sharply with the church as it exists today, and some may argue that this contrast is too sharp to overcome. Nevertheless, despite our weaknesses, sins and lack of responsiveness to the power and presence of the Spirit, that same Holy Spirit continues to kiss and bless us each and all, thus anointing us for continuing the mission of Jesus.

The following story may be a helpful way to illustrate the capacity of the Spirit for knowing our weaknesses, for loving us in spite of them and for using those same weaknesses to reveal the generous love of God through us. A young wife and mother suffered a severe stroke and was left paralyzed on one side and confined to a wheelchair. Even after she underwent intensive physical therapy, the effects of the stroke were still in evidence, especially in the crooked little grimace that had replaced her once beautiful and gentle smile. In order to show her that his love for her had not changed, her husband knelt down beside her wheelchair and contorted his own mouth in order to fit his lips to hers. ?You see,? he said, ?we still fit!? Like this loving husband, the Holy Spirit, whose presence we celebrate today, shapes its power to our crookedness so that we can be worthy witnesses of God?s love and the good news of salvation to all humankind.

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[1] http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/052712-mass-during-the-day.cfm