



Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Rt. Rev. Andrew ML Dietsche Transcript

"Discernment, Promises, and Action"

"Pentecost calls the Church to accept and embrace the high calling we have as Christians." Recalling the evil in the world, seen tragically in recent events in Buffalo, Uvalde, Ukraine, and other places, the Rt. Rev. Andrew ML Dietsche in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost at Trinity Church, calls upon us to renounce evil. "The act of renouncing is not simply an act of decrying evil when we see it or being appalled, but also vowing that the evil in the world will not have power over us. We will not be defeated. We will not lose heart. We will not give up...It is the responsibility of good and godly people to demand accountability for the wicked for the things that they do." The readings are Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:25-35, 37; Romans 8:14-17; and John 14:8-17.

Sermon Transcript:

In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Please be seated.

It is always a joy for me to be invited back to Trinity Parish for our annual celebration of the Pentecost. And this year, it is especially festive. We have almost 40 people who will be presented this morning for the sacraments and rites of initiation in the Christian tradition. And the Episcopal Church. Half will be baptized. Some of them will know they're being baptized, and the rest will be surprised. The remainder will renew their baptismal vows through the sacrament of confirmation and reception into this communion. All of us, this whole congregation, will reaffirm our vows and promises as well, as they are contained within the baptismal covenant. This is a profound, happy occasion. It is one of the principal feasts of the church. And it is the signature festival of the Holy Spirit in our worship life. And I'm glad to be here. Glad to be here with my good friend and your rector, Phil Jackson, with Michael Bird, the vicar of this parish, and with the community of associate priests who make up the ordained leadership of Trinity Parish. And I'm glad to be here with all of you. We are still new enough in our return to life after COVID that full churches are a marvel to our eyes. And we are grateful to God for bringing us through safely and allowing us to gather again to share fellowship with one another, and to worship God with a common voice side-by-side. The story of the Pentecost tells of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and the church as manifest in fire and wind. The scripture tells of hurricane winds blowing through the room where the disciples were gathered. And I am reminded that Jesus had long ago told Nicodemus that the Holy Spirit comes and moves like the wind. That no one knows from where it comes or where it goes. It is a mystical and mysterious thing. The Old Testament and New Testament words in both Hebrew and Greek join into one. The definitions of wind, breath, and spirit.

In the Book of Acts, the Holy Spirit comes as a mighty wind. In the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit comes as the quiet breath of Jesus. But let me say that over two years into COVID, I find these wonderful images so familiar to us and so evocative, more poignant than I ever have. After two years of taking

halting half breaths through a mask and afraid to take a deep breath in the presence of others. the images of breath and wind offer a refreshment much longed for and speak to us of the freedom and life promised by Christ in the coming of the Spirit, a freedom and a life which our own history has reminded us is not to be taken for granted. If wind and breath are fitting metaphors for the Spirit of God, then surely sickness and suffocation are at least as powerful metaphors for our human need for God and our desperate yearning for the Spirit. Today in baptism and in baptism renewed, we are all about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church and upon the people of the church, and we will pray for the gift and grace of the Spirit for those being baptized and confirmed as well as for those being received and reaffirming their vows and promises. The prayer for those being confirmed will ask that they will daily increase in God's Holy Spirit more and more. And those words point; it seems to me, toward the progressive, moving, expansive quality of the Holy Spirit which is never static or passive but grows and branches in and through the life of the sanctified for the good and for the transformation of all the world. Not only through those being presented today, but for all of us, for the community of the baptized that filled with Holy Spirit, we will be lifted and raised to be in and for the world, the bearers of the healing and transformative grace of the living God. This is why we get baptized. It is why we come back and renew that baptism in confirmations, and then again and again over the course of our lives.

On the first Pentecost, in the story we have heard from the Book of Acts, the immediate consequence of the coming of the Spirit was that this small band of exceptionally ordinary men. Fishermen and tax collectors were compelled into the world with the voice and proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their mouths and proclaimed that gospel, the love of God for all people through our Lord Jesus Christ to all the world in words that could be understood across race and language, and culture, and nation. This was the power of the Spirit: to give a voice to the church and to give ears to the world. First and immediately, there was the transformation of the disciples themselves. For those of you being confirmed today, the Pentecost is the confirmation of the disciples. It's their coming into their mature expression and life of faith. And then through them, the transformation of the world by the love of friend, stranger, and enemy, by the forgiveness of sins, by the making of beloved community that the Kingdom of Heaven might come upon, in and through them for the healing of all people. It is one thing for us to read this in ancient scripture, among a myriad stories of miracle and wonder. And it is quite another thing to read this as the life description for the church, as we know it and live in it. Pentecost calls the church to accept and embrace the high calling we have as Christians and not to be afraid of the boldness of our claim or shrink from it, or turn away from what that will require of us. Someone's getting baptized, I can just tell. Here is what this requires of us, baptism happens as a set of questions and responses which taken together form the vows and promises of baptism. Those questions and responses come in two sets. The first set are renunciations of the evil existent in the world, which besets us from without, which destroys and degrades and diminishes the people of the world and of God. And also the evil which rises up from within us. By which we are made complicit in that larger phenomenon of wickedness in the world.

The first thing to note is that the words of the baptism liturgy do not shrink from declaring the reality of evil as a conscious corrosive force in the world, and those words name that evil as Satan. I just learned last week that the anthropologist Margaret Mead was a consultant on the writing of our Prayer Book. And when they were working on those rites, and they were working on the baptism liturgy and the prayers, some of the bishops asked why we were talking about Satan since none of us really believe in Satan after all. And Margaret Mead said, "Well, you bishops may not believe in Satan, but we anthropologists do." And she won the day. And the church retained that ancient name of our adversary, the embodiment of evil, the conscious mind behind corrosion in the world, and left it in our baptism. It is hard for me to imagine how we could look upon the evil that we see about us. Buffalo and Uvalde,

Ukraine, and the myriad things we do and say to one another that fill us with regret, and mark us with guilt and shame, and not see through it to a deeper force of evil will and purpose that is working on us and working against us all the time. And baptism knows that that evil must be renounced. And it happens in our prayer book and in our church. And it's happening here today. But I would say about that, that the act of renouncing Satan and all the forces of wickedness that rebel against God, is not simply an act of decrying evil when we see it or being appalled by the work of evil men. But also vowing that the evil that is in the world will not have power or dominion over us. Which means not only that we promise not to be defined and shaped by evil, not drawn into evil, or drawn to return evil for evil. Not to do bad when we could do good, but also that we will not be defeated or worn away by evil. That we will not lose heart, that we will not give up. Even when we look on the faces of the men and women of Buffalo, or the small children of Uvalde, or the refugees on the road in Ukraine, and our hearts are just broken and we fall into weeping. You have probably heard me say, because I say it all the time, that the sacramental life of the Episcopal Church exists almost entirely as a body of promises.

We make promises at baptism, and we renew those promises at confirmation. But we also make promises at marriage and at ordination. And at the heart of all of our rites are the making of promises to one another and to God. The promises that we make define us. And they tell the world and our God the kind of men and women we intend to be. We declare ourselves and say who we are and what matters. We define ourselves by the promises we make and the world about us and our God, may take our measure by the fidelity with which we keep those promises. In a real sense the whole Christian Adventure is about making and keeping promises. Which is why the second set of baptismal promises is what the rite is really all about. First, we renounce evil. We will stay brave and strong in a broken world. But we do that so that we will be free in soul and will, to bind ourselves to Jesus Christ. Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept Him as your Lord and Savior? Do you put your whole trust in His grace and love? This is where the hope of the world lays. Those who joined themselves to the gospel of Jesus Christ, who find true liberation of life and spirit in the love of God for all people through Jesus Christ, who find that real power in the world is embodied in mercy and humility, peace and patience, charity and self-control and the forgiveness of sins, are already beginning to transform the world. To make beloved community, to bring into being the kingdom of heaven. This is God's purpose. And it is so that we may be partners in that purpose, that we come to receive baptism and then to continue in the lifelong reaffirming of our baptism, the forever renewing of our vows. That we may be constant and true and that we may be depended on by a desperate and seeking world. All that I will ask of those being confirmed and received today is if they will, in our presence, reaffirm the renunciation of evil and renew their commitment to Christ. All I'm going to do is ask them if they still mean it, if they are still all in, if they will go forward with us to help shape a world of character and grace. And if by the things that they do and the things that they say, they will bring the transformation of God to a hungry and thirsty people and make the world new. I told you that these are bold claims that require everything we have. And it is only by the Holy Spirit within us, making us brave and strong and faithful that we can keep our promises and rise to the challenges put before us by a broken world and the gospel life.

Today we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church and to all of us, every one. So immediately following the baptism by water, there is a prayer which will be said, which is the prayer for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And it is these gifts that will or can make us truly the people of God. It is in these gifts that we see the possibility for holy human living contained in baptism and made possible by the Holy Spirit. We pray in thanksgiving that the newly baptized have been brought into the life of grace, and that they have been forgiven of their sins, but then we continue and we pray that they be given an inquiring and discerning heart. We talk in the church all the time about discernment, about our deep inquiry into things and people, and the story of what people do so that we may discover why they do what they do,

to see the good and to see the evil and to be able to know the difference. It is the responsibility of good and Godly people to demand accountability of the wicked for the things that they do, and the people that they hurt, and the destruction they cause, but it is also our responsibility to look deeper and behind the actions of people to the forces which brought them to their wrongdoing, to come to them with the hope of understanding in the fullness of their being, to discern between the good and the evil within them, and to approach even the most grievous offenders with compassion and the certainty that they are loved by God. That we may love the children of Uvalde, which is easy, but also the terrible young man who did the worst thing in the world. We ask the Spirit, teach us how. Give us, we pray, inquiring and discerning hearts that we may see good and evil and know the difference without defeat or exhaustion, but made strong and brave by faith and made perfect in loving by the grace of the Spirit. We keep praying. Give these newly baptized, we ask, the courage to will and to persevere. We pray that their wills and our wills may be conformed to the will of God. That we may do and say those things which God would have us do and say. That we may desire those things which God desires and love that which God loves. Jesus told Nicodemus to look to the wind and see the movement of the Holy Spirit.

It is all mystery and wonder, ineffable and beyond our knowing. But within that metaphor is a way into the mind and heart of God. Give us, we ask God, The eyes to see that which cannot be seen, and to understand those things which pass all understanding, that we may know your heart and have courage to know and to do those things which are your purpose in and for the world. Make us brave and strong and faithful to continue the effort to fight the good fight, to never give up on God or on one another or on this broken and suffering world, until in God's time, the problem of good and evil is resolved, and we may prevail and claim the victory. This we pray for those who will be baptized today. And finally, give them a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. So it is this. It is only by the Holy Spirit within us, filling our minds and hearts and enlivening our own spirits. That knowledge of God is possible, and the love of God. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit that we may know God at all. Or that we might pray, or that we might make art and music and God's name and offer our praises. Or that we might forgive the sins of others, or that we might preach good news to the poor. Or that we might look upon the sick and the broken, the marginalized, and see the beauty of our shared humanity and reach back with compassion and help and healing. By the Spirit and only by the Spirit we may know God, and to the knowledge of God, we may look back upon ourselves and one another, and know ourselves for the first time. And by the grace of the Holy Spirit, that knowledge of God and self and world, may pour forth from us as love. These are the things that we will pray today for the newly baptized. These things are the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is just this that the disciples proclaimed and the world heard and understood. It is just this, which is the transformation of the world. It is love and power, it is meaning and poignancy, and it is the heroism, of a single Christian life and the whole Christian family and enterprise, and it is this that we celebrate on Pentecost.

Amen.