

The Week After the Day of Pentecost – Year B – June 3, 2009 - Homily
Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:25-35, 37; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15
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If you haven't heard the name Sonia Sotomayor all over the news recently, then perhaps you've been a little out of touch. Judge Sotomayor is President Obama's current nominee for a seat in the Supreme Court. According to the White House press release about her, "If confirmed, Sotomayor would bring more federal judicial experience to the Supreme Court than any justice in 100 years, and more overall judicial experience than anyone confirmed for the Court in the past 70 years." Her record is impressive, and importantly crosses some cultural stereotypes and barriers as well.

There is a lot of legal language associated with the Holy Spirit. She is variously described as the Advocate, comforter, witness to Truth, a dove, tongues of fire, the spirit of wisdom, and guide. In particular an advocate is generally one who pleads another's cause before the judge in a courtroom. Having said that, when we look closely at the Gospel reading this evening we see that the Holy Spirit is also the one who works like a prosecutor against the world, proving "the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment". In effect, the Holy Spirit continues Jesus' work in the world promoting God's justice, and convicting the hearts of those who do not seek or live by God's justice.

Let's look more closely at the work of the third person of the Trinity in the world and in the life of believers. As we have just heard, according to John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit brings God's justice to the world convicting the world for God on three counts: sin, righteousness and judgment. Jesus tells us that the world is convicted of sin because they do not believe in Him. We can take this to mean several things. The Holy Spirit is a witness to God's Truth. As a symptom of sinfulness those who do not believe in Jesus as the revealed Truth of God, are far from being reconciled to God and remain in their sin. Then there is the fact that placing self at the center of all things tends to preclude belief in and discipleship to Jesus. That kind of self-centeredness is, at heart, sin. When the powers of the world convicted the Son of God in a worldly court, they committed a terrible crime. To charge and convict one who is without sin to be guilty of anything in this world proves our fallenness beyond all reasonable doubt. The question we have to ask ourselves and others is, how can one live in God's truth, if we do not believe in Jesus, who is God incarnate. Nonetheless the Holy Spirit continues to bring the light of truth to the hearts of all, convicting the consciences of individuals so that they become aware of their sinfulness, and especially in how wrong the world is about Jesus in its unbelief.

The Holy Spirit also convicts the world with respect to righteousness. Righteousness means to be in right relationship with God. It is closely linked with its opposite number "sin". In John's Gospel, Jesus describes the world as wrong about righteousness, "because I am going to the father and you will see me no longer." We may well ask, why does that prove the world wrong about righteousness? Remember that believers are only clothed in righteousness through the gift of faith and by God's grace. Those who have not accepted the gift of faith are still clothed in sin and death. Jesus is our model of right relationship with God, because Jesus aligned His will perfectly with God's will. In consenting to take upon Himself the sins of the world – as only God could possibly do -- Jesus provided all people with the means to salvation, that is freedom from sin and death. Through the resurrection of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, God shows all people that the way to reconciliation with the Father is through His Son. By means of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, all our sins are forgiven. Through faith in Him, God grants believers the cloak of righteousness. Rejecting that gift of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus is tantamount to rejecting God's offer of right relationship.

Thirdly the Holy Spirit convicts the world in judgment. In Jesus' death on a cross it appears as if evil and death have triumphed and Jesus was rightly condemned by the world. In the resurrection, God has the final word. In the resurrection God effectively reverses the death sentence executed by the world, and proves the world wrong in its judgment of Jesus. Christ's victory over sin and death is actually the judgment of God against the 'ruler of this world', namely Satan, who now stands condemned.

The good news for you and I, as followers of Christ is that our faith has saved us. In faith, our sins are washed away by the blood of our Lord. That doesn't mean that we stop sinning, but it does mean that sin no longer rules our lives. We have accepted the gift of true life in Christ, regularly confess our sins, truly repent and work to intentionally turn our lives little by little, piece by piece, over to God's rule. Our hearts are continually being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit throughout every moment of our new life in Christ to join with Him in revealing more of God's Truth and justice to the world. I can't predict what God has planned for Judge Sotomayor and her pursuit of justice. All I know is that we can all be guided by the Holy Spirit in bringing more of God's justice to the world.

The good news for you and I, as lovers of Christ is that His love covers the sorry stained sinfulness of our natural state as fallen human beings with the glory that is Christ's love for each of us. God sees that love of Christ shining in us, fanned to ever brighter flames by the indwelling Holy Spirit and God sees that we are His very own. Just as Christ is, we are, in God's eyes. By virtue of our faith and love in Jesus, you and I are robed in righteousness. More importantly, being in right relationship with God, our hearts become more Christ-like, and our wills become more and more aligned with God's will. And as we grow in our faith and continue our spiritual journey, that gift means that our lives are visibly transformed. We no longer desire the things of the world, that lead us into sin, or are focused on self-righteousness. We find our joy lies in loving and worshipping the Lord. Sharing that love by caring for others and striving for justice and peace in the world. Only God knows whether Judge Sotomayor will become Justice Sotomayor and whether she will stir up hearts to understand that in God's eyes all truly are equal regardless of gender or ethnic origin. All I know is that the power of the Holy Spirit is an irresistible centrifugal force, spreading out from us to do God's work in the world. Yet, in that lovely paradoxical way of God, the power of the Holy Spirit is also an irresistible centripetal force within us, continuing our own transformation to holiness, even as it draws towards us the goodness in others, bringing others into the circle of God's light and love.

The good news for you and I, as disciples of Jesus is that God has already judged us and our salvation is assured. Faith in the resurrection is our hope, and the hope of the whole world. What good news this is. Sin and death have been defeated. What a message this is to a world that has so completely embraced a culture of death. As the old saying goes, "where there's life, there's hope". You and I know that only in Jesus can anyone find true Life. He is our creator and redeemer. You and I know that only through faith in Christ are we assured of eternal life. We have hope, and it is exactly what the world needs. God wants the whole world to be reconciled to Himself. He isn't trying to make it difficult, but He does ask for our help. The world needs hope. We have it to share in abundance. Good news indeed, don't you think?

Amen.