

Two years ago this week, I went to Tampa for the funeral of my Mom's brother, Richard, my uncle and godfather.

While the occasion was a sad one, to my delight, I got to spend time with a bunch of cousins whom I had not seen in 25 to 30 years. Naturally the talk turned to family, to parents, grandparents, those who did well by us and those who caused considerable pain. The good and the bad. The ugly and the beautiful.

What was so deeply felt was that we who were there to celebrate the life of Uncle Richard weren't alone. Standing shoulder to shoulder with us were the dead, those parents and grandparents who had so much to say, so much to do with who we all have become today.

The dead were very much alive with us down in Tampa, as we remembered the good, and the bad, the ugly, and the beautiful, that got us here today.

And in this very Church, our beloved Saint Elizabeth's, every week, but particularly at Pentecost, we the living are not alone in these pews.

This year, we have grieved for and celebrated the lives of **Elizabeth Wong, Priscilla Kuniyoshi, Johnny Kuniyoshi,** and **Mildred Shinto.** Just last week, dear **Helen Ing** died. In ways we cannot understand, they are each of them here in our midst. Sometimes, it feels like we have to squeeze in just to fit all of us in the pews.

We are all here. We are all here.

I share these thoughts not because I am feeling particularly nostalgic. I share these thoughts because the lesson of Pentecost is (quoting Will Willimon): "We are all here".

In the reading from Acts, we are told that people from all over the world are in Jerusalem. But if you read it carefully, you will see that the people were not only from other places, they were from other times too.

The Elamites who were there at Pentecost? They would have had to travel not only a few hundred miles to be there, they would have had to travel a few hundred years! You see, they died out around 600 BC.

Same for the Medes. They had long since gone extinct.

Tom Long says this about that first Pentecost, (assuming it happened today): "You should have been there with us on Pentecost! We had a huge number of visitors for the service. Some were all the way from Montana! There were people from Arizona, and Michigan, not to mention a whole van load of Assyrians, a couple of Babylonians and a nice little Hittite couple who asked to be baptized."

By bringing together not only people from every WHERE, but also people from every WHEN, God has caused something marvelous to happen. Remember the Tower of Babel? Humanity got a collective swelled head and decided to become God. Everyone spoke one language. A tower was built to reach heaven. God scattered that effort at uniformity, that worship of ego and pride, of domination and control.

Pentecost is God's answer to Babel. The scattering has ended. People from all over are joined back together. But not by human pride. Not by the ego or domination or control. And most definitely not by one language. At Pentecost, everyone hears and understands; but in their own language, in the sounds of their own traditions.

The gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is not uniformity, it is harmony!

Divergent voices from everywhere on earth hear and speak the great miracle that God has accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Just as the prophet Joel foresaw:

"Your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

Each in our own language. Each in our own tradition. This is the marvelous tapestry woven by God!

We so often think of salvation as something WE must do, something WE must achieve. But the gift of the spirit shows just how wrong we are to think that. Salvation is not about what we do for God; it is what God is doing for us.

Fr. Vince Donovan lived for years among the Masai people in Africa. He tells the story of a Masai elder who came, after a long time, to faith in Jesus. That elder said this about what he discovered:

“When I first thought about faith, I thought of the lion on the hunt. Its hair on end. Its nostrils wide. It pounces and consumes. I thought I was the lion in pursuit of faith. But now I think differently. The lion is still there, hair raised, eyes wide, pouncing and consuming. But the lion is God, and I, I am the prey.”

In the beginning God breathed into Adam and the first man came alive.

On that first Pentecost, Our Lord breathed on 11 frightened men and they were transformed into a force that would change the world. On this day, Our Lord breathes on us, and out of a scattered, confused, worried people, that breath creates a community living in the spirit of reconciliation, a community based on non-violence, and a community that is full of gifted people using each gift to create, here and now, a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. Here and now.

Here in these islands, one of the greatest gifts we have is the rebirth of the Hawaiian culture. After years of persecution, it is alive and growing today. Part of that rebirth is greeting one another in the traditional Polynesian way: Forehead touching forehead; nose touching nose, breath exchanged with breath.

Peace is at hand. Forgiveness is born. A community is formed.

The Spirit is in the breath.

Such are the gifts received then. Such are the gifts received today.

And these ragdolls that have been so lovingly made? Before you send them off — breathe on each one. Send your breath to our brothers and sisters, our little children, who live in too much fear, too much uncertainty, too much pain. Send your breath with these dolls, for in the breath is life.

My family in Tampa, our family of St. E's, the living and the dead, our Polynesian family. The children of Iraq and Afghanistan. Those from everywhere and every when, at that first Pentecost, we are all together!

Saved! Redeemed! Made new! By the God who will not take NO for an answer. The God who will do it all to have us. Thanks be to God!

Amen+