

Pentecost- C (Deacon Pat Hall)

Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34; Romans 8:8-17; John 20:19-23
Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/nab/052310.shtml>

*And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit."*

The Greek word is the same for spirit, wind and breath. The same is true of the Hebrew. In the Pentecost scene of our first reading, the word describes the spirit in the driving wind. In the resurrection appearance of our Gospel, the spirit is in the quiet breath.

The exact same word is found in Genesis.

The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being. (Gn2:7)

We are creatures of the earth. There is not an element of our bodies that was not first an element of the earth. And every element of our body is destined to return to the earth. Yet, because of God's divine breath, we are also divine creatures, made for eternity.

We use words of the senses to help describe what is greater and beyond our senses. And yet sometimes we don't appreciate the power of the sensual word. Take the word "breath". Most of us haven't thought twice about our breathing today. How can we begin to appreciate the spiritual, if we don't appreciate the physical? Join me in this exercise. I'm going to ask all of you to hold your breath. Now usually that means inhaling a lung full and holding it, like we do when we swim underwater. But, I am going to ask you to exhale, empty your lungs and then hold it. You can inhale when you want to, but I'd like you to hold it until you feel like you really don't want to anymore. I timed this for myself and I'll time it for you. Ready? Exhale all the air from your lungs—hold it—5 seconds, that's easy, what's the fuss? 10 seconds—well, not comfortable, but I'm OK. 15 seconds—hey, this isn't very much fun. 20 seconds—hey, this hurts—huh-aaahhhhhh. How long can you go without eating? How long can you go without water? How long can you go without breathing? Can you **feel** how important breathing is? My childhood best friend had asthma. There were times when we were running around that he would have an attack. Some of his bouts were close ones. Can you remember times when you were out of breath or had the wind knocked out of you or had an older brother hold you under the water longer than you wanted? When I was a first responder for the City, I was involved in CPR rescues. As I was performing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation I remember screaming in my brain, "Breathe! Breathe!" Sometimes they did.

So when we see God breathing into the clay, when we see Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit unto the disciples, can we begin to appreciate the power of breath? It is God's

breath that makes us real today. It is God's breath that takes us into eternity.

And so *why* does God breathe into the clay? *Why* does Jesus breathe upon the disciples? It is to bring us into loving communion with God. As humanity received the breath of life, we were to be the stewards of God's holy creation. Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into his disciples so that they might be in the world as Jesus was in the world. Those frightened disciples were overcome with joy at discovering Jesus' presence, a joy they pass on to us and for us to pass on to later generations.

As the disciples received the Holy Spirit, they were commissioned to forgive or retain sin. The forgiveness they offer is not their own, but Jesus' forgiveness being made present by the Holy Spirit. They have... we have... been given the divine power to bring others into God's love. We also are the light bearers to expose sin where ever there is oppression, prejudice, hatred, loneliness, illness, or violence. We were commissioned by Jesus to shine his light, to expose sin, to name it, to challenge it and to offer the healing of God's forgiveness.

Allow the Spirit in with every breath we take. Breathe in and become Jesus' healing love to the world.