

**Sunday, May 31, 2020 11:15am The Day of Pentecost Sermon Transcript
The Rt. Rev. Andrew ML Dietsche: To Bring Peace, We Must Strive for Justice**

On this Holy Feast of Pentecost, the Rt. Rev. Andrew M.L. Dietsche, Bishop of New York, speaks to the ways we as people of Christ should strive for justice amidst the dual crises of white supremacy and COVID-19. In his letter read by the Rev. Phillip Jackson, Dietsche says, “we start by insisting again that Black Lives Matter, and must matter, to every person of faith.” In his pre-recorded sermon, Dietsche also shares gratitude for the Trinity community’s swift action in joining him to create the Diocese of New York Emergency Grants Program, helping support parishes weather the chaos of the coronavirus pandemic.

Watch the sermon. The readings are Acts 2:1–21; Psalm 104:25–35, 37; 1 Corinthians 12:3b–13; and John 20:19–23.

Sermon Transcript:

[The Rev. Phillip Jackson] Good morning everyone. Our bishop has asked that I read a letter which he has drafted for us at the service this morning. Pentecost, May 31st, 2020. My dear brothers and sisters, today I will be completing a letter to go out to the people in churches of the Diocese of New York and the larger church and world, in contemplation of the killings of George Floyd last Monday, Breonna Taylor in March, and Ahmaud Arbery in February.

But as I am with you today, however, virtually, I would like to share my thoughts with the Trinity congregation regarding this new rash of police violence against Black people in three different states. George, Breonna, and Ahmaud, join Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and dozens of others who have fallen victim to the outrages of racist America and the fatal assaults of rogue police across our country.

At a time when pandemic has led everyone to be told to distance from one another and to stay home, seen so many clustered in the streets at personal risk in protest of these deaths is a testament to the exhaustion, frustration, shared grief, and anger of Americans across our country. The killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, six years ago, inaugurated a series of killings of Black people by police in every part of our country, including Deborah Danner of this parish, and Eric Garner of Staten Island, and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Month after month, we made our witness, we made our protest, we advocated for the value of African-American lives. The killings of George, Breonna, and Ahmaud, are not only tragic, and violent, and abominable in their own right, but they drive home the harsh truth that almost nothing has changed, and that the ancient pattern of contempt by people of power toward people of color continues unabated.

Again, the church must exercise that voice which is our inheritance as the Beloved Community and people of faith, and continue to hold power accountable, and demand reform and transformation of police power and our whole system of justice. We must be part of that justice if we hope to be part of the peace. But over the months of the COVID pandemic, we have watched as the wealthy have fled the city to weekend in summer homes, while the poor have been left clustered in dense apartment buildings at the center of the epidemic.

We have watched, and many of us have been the privileged, working safely from home on full salary, while those who serve in hospitals, and drive ambulances, and who pack and deliver groceries and pharmaceuticals, and who deliver for restaurants, and who care for old people in nursing homes, and drive subways and taxis, are forced day after day back into the public square, and jobs which expose them to continual risk of disease. We have seen COVID claim a terrible harvest in Black and Latino communities, far beyond the losses among white people, and strike a hammer blow upon the undocumented, as the ongoing injustices of poverty, and diet, and lack of access to healthcare have made disproportional pandemic death a new terrible price of our racial and economic inequality. On the Feast of the Pentecost, we celebrate that we are baptized disciples of Jesus Christ, and that we have been graced and gifted by the Holy Spirit into that new Creation heralded by Saint Paul.

In our baptismal covenant, we promise to quote, "strive for justice and peace, and respect the dignity of every human being." This is of Christ. This is part of the transformation to a fuller and more glorious humanity before God. We are all of us participants in a culture and economy which dehumanizes people of color, and counts their lives so cheap. So the striving for justice will require something from every one of us. White supremacy is written into the American character in ways of which White people are often unaware. But as people of Christ, we start by insisting again that Black lives matter, and must matter to every person of faith. If our advocacy is to arise from our love, if we are to be agents of the change, it must also arise out of our humility, and contrition, and our resolve.

With every good wish, I remain yours, The Right Reverend Andrew M.L. Dietsche, the Bishop of New York.

[Bishop Dietsche] Grace to you and peace from God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm delighted to be back with the congregation of Trinity Parish for the celebration of the Feast of the Pentecost. I'm sorry to be doing this remotely, but among all of the profound and tragic costs of the COVID pandemic, there are also the countless inconveniences that we are enduring and living with in order to protect one another from this disease, and the distancing as part of that. So I greet you today from my own home and hold you in prayer in all of the places where you are, and in all of the places where you are joining Trinity's worship this morning.

I'm particularly grateful to Phil Jackson for the Spirit, in which he and the Trinity Vestry have joined with me in the creation of the Diocese of New York Emergency Grants Program. At the very beginning, Father Jackson asked me how Trinity could support the Diocese during the COVID emergency. Out of those conversations, this grants program was born. Both John Talty and Hilary Pennington of this parish, are serving on the committee which is administering the grants program, and I'm gratified to say that some 125 or more parishes in the Diocese of New York have applied for grants and are receiving needed financial resources to weather the chaos of the COVID emergency, and come out the other end intact. This partnership between the Diocese of New York and Trinity Parish represents very intentionally our desire to deepen the relationship between this church and its diocese, and between your priest and Vestry and their bishop.

I could not be more pleased or grateful, and so I'm delighted today to be able to thank your leadership before the congregation for their vision, faith, and engagement at the larger church of which we're a part. In the chaos with which we are all living, Trinity Parish is helping to make a positive difference

in this venerable diocese. The Feast of the Pentecost is one of our principle feasts, and represents the end of the season of Easter. Coming 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus, the Pentecost celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, and threw them upon the Christian church. In our scripture readings through this holy day, we find two accounts of the gift of the Spirit: one from the Gospel of John, and one which is told in the book of Acts by, it is believed Luke the Evangelist as a second chapter to his gospel.

The story which John tells happens on Easter night. That morning, evidence was received by Mary Magdalene and the disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Over the course of the day, the risen Christ revealed Himself further to the disciples. That night when the disciples were together in the upper room, hiding and afraid behind locked doors, Jesus came and appeared among them. He showed them the nail holes in His hands and the spear thrust in his side, and said, "Peace be with you."

In a great exhalation, He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained." In the very first verse of the Bible, we are told that in the beginning, at the Creation, a wind from God moved over the face of the waters. The word for that primordial wind is the same as the word for the breath with which Jesus bathed His disciples, the Hebrew word ruach and the Greek word pneuma. I think that it is no accident that the same Evangelist who opened this gospel with the words which opened Genesis in the beginning, in the beginning was the Word, would end his gospel with a recapitulation of God's act of Creation.

Indeed, Saint Paul draws upon that when writing to the church in Corinth. "If anyone is in Christ," he says, "They are a new Creation. Everything old has passed away. See, everything has become new." That same breath of creation by which God brought all things into being, and all that into life, is revealed by Jesus to be the Holy Spirit, and by that same Spirit, Jesus brings a church into being, and the disciples into new life. But I want to carry this another step. When Jesus poured the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, He explained Himself, "Now you have the power to forgive and the power to withhold forgiveness.

This is the basis for discernment, for the wisdom to know and understand good and evil. It is the foundation of reconciliation, by which can come the transformation of the passions of people, and then through a transformed people, the saving of the world." Here Jesus gives as free gift by the indwelling of the Spirit, that which way back in the Creation narratives, Adam and Eve sought to take for themselves by deceit and thievery, the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They wanted to become like God by stealth.

Now on Easter night, on John's telling of the Pentecost, Jesus makes his disciples like him by free choice, by his own act of will, and names them his friends. The disciples are now in Christ. His breath is in their lungs, and they are made in new Creation. The story from the book of Acts is different. Fifty days have passed since the first Easter Day. But again, we find the disciples gathered in the upper room when the Holy Spirit comes upon them and does so also as a wind, which blows over and around and through them, a mighty wind like an indoor hurricane, which in its passing, leaves tongues of flame above the heads of the disciples.

Suddenly and instantly, the disciples discover in themselves the power of language, the understanding of words, and the ability to proclaim in all of the languages of the world, the love of God and the grace

of the risen Christ. They ran into the streets making the witness and never looked back. If before the Pentecost, they were still looking back into their lives of discipleship with Jesus, now they looked out to a horizon and beyond, embracing the new missional mandate and purpose which they understood now was theirs. Thomas went to India, Andrew to Asia minor, John to Ephesus, Peter to Rome.

It is out of the Acts account and the emergence of the Apostolic missional drive, that sending out, which was God's apostolic blessing upon the disciples, that the Pentecost is often called the birthday of the Church, and what began in that upper room reached out to touch every place in the world. But in the same way that the story told by John calls us to see ourselves in the Church as a new Creation and does that with reference to the ancient story of Creation.

In the Acts account, Luke also draws upon ancient teachings and practices to help us understand what the coming of the spirit means for the Twelve, and again, through them for us. The feast of the Pentecost is celebrated on the 50th day after Easter, precisely so that it will resonate for us with the Jewish Feast of Booths, which is celebrated on the 50th day after the beginning of the Passover. So it is also called Pentecost, and remembers the giving of the Torah, the books of the law, to Moses by God on Mount Sinai. It was the law which created out of the people of Israel, a nation of righteousness and a kingdom of priests, which was God's desire from the start and which amounted to a new Creation in its own right.

God said to Moses, "I gave you the law so that you might be holy, as I am holy." In the same way in Acts, God gave the disciples the Holy Spirit. The first fruit of that was that they discover that the true word of Christ, gospel love, was already on their own lips. The Jewish Pentecost celebrates the making of a holy people and the Christian Pentecost celebrates exactly the same thing and the bringing into being of the Church. On Holy Tuesday each year, (but not this year) chrism, the oil of baptism, is consecrated by the bishop in the cathedral in the sight of all the clergy.

Chrism is a mixture of olive oil and balsam. In the consecration of the oil, the bishop bows down and breathes over the surface of the oil. It is a thing we do, which is resonant with the wind at the beginning of Creation, and it is resonant with the coming of the Holy Spirit, whether the breath of Jesus in John or the hurricane wind of God in the Acts. We give bottles of chrism to every parish, and it is used the coming year in all of our churches at every baptism. After the candidate for baptism is washed in water, the chrism is applied to the head of the newly baptized with the words, "you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever."

Notwithstanding the freedom of God and His Spirit to move and act wherever and however God wills, this right is how the Church, doing the best we can, invokes and bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit upon its members. You and I are all of us baptized and we have received the Holy Spirit and that spirit dwells and glows and burns within us, even if we don't always know exactly what that means. But let me take a stab at it. So in our rite, after the water baptism, there is a prayer which is said at the time of the anointing and the invoking of the Holy Spirit, a prayer in which we pray for the one just baptized that they will be sustained in God's Holy Spirit and they will be given an inquiring and discerning heart, and the courage to will and to persevere, and a spirit to know and to love God, and most delightfully, the gift of joy and wonder in all of God's works.

These are the gifts of the Holy Spirit and they are the virtues of Christ. These are God's own special things. When my own daughters were baptized and my grandchildren, I have stood at the font and taken into the deep recesses of my understanding the sentiments and hopes expressed in that prayer and whispered to myself, "yes, this is what I want for them. Not riches or power or beauty, those are

just distractions, but that they may have a curious, wise, courageous, and loving, joyful, and miraculous spirit open to the possibility and the promise that is God."

I have prayed that same thing for all of the babies and even for all of the old people. That I have brought to the font of baptism through all of the years of my priesthood. How much would we ask these things for one another? How much would we desire to see the dawn of a new Creation rising within one another? To see in each other the life and love of God, to know the Holy Spirit when we see it, and to discover in surprise delight, the Resurrection happening in every face and never forget that we are each of us miracles. The coming of the Holy Spirit, as John wants us to hear and Luke wants us to know, is no novelty, but is the fulfillment of the ancient things, the oldest and most venerable stirrings in hopes of all of the people of the world, each who have opened themselves before God.

One of the highest costs of this COVID crisis for me is that we have had to suspend the practice of confirmation, the sacrament by which we rediscover, renew, and embrace all over again the spirit within us and the spirit-filled lives, which are our true calling. When I was a parish priest, the bishop would come to my church every other year and we would have confirmation and he would go away again. They were glad to see him come and glad to see him go. But then I became a bishop and confirmation became my life, my almost every Sunday, week after week practice of worship and prayer.

At the moment of the act of Confirmation, the candidate kneels before the bishop, seated before the altar, and I reach out and take her head into my hands. It is a close face-to-face intimacy, almost shockingly so, and then I can offer on behalf of the entire church, the prayer that strengthened and defended by God, she will daily increase in the Holy Spirit more and more. I confess that I'm not sure what the "increasing" means or the "more and more," except that it speaks to me of the constant eternal forever making new, which God is doing in her, the new Creation which she is becoming and which is for her, our most fervent prayer and heart's desire.

That miracle and wonder, that rising hope, that all in all, that possibility is why we celebrate the Pentecost. Her life and heart and spirit is what it means.

Amen.