Pentecost Sunday, 5/28/23—9:30 and 11:30 AM

I will never forget July 4, 1976, not only because it was the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence but also because of a phone call I received that morning. July 4, 1976, was a tremendous celebration because it was the Bi-Centennial of our country’s independence, lots of music, lots of parades, lots of fireworks; some of you may remember it yourself. I had only been ordained two years at that point and had just concelebrated the parish’s morning Mass for the holiday when I received a phone call from a man who was obviously intoxicated. The reason for his call was that he wanted to go to confession over the phone. When I asked him why, he told me that he had been involved in the Battle of the Bulge, the German surprise attack on the Allied forces which began on December 16, 1944, in an attempt split those Allied forces in two. As part of that attack, a group of German SS soldiers had captured 123 American soldiers at a place called Malmedy and shot them dead execution style. A few days later, my caller and his American fellow soldiers had captured a similar number of German soldiers. They had heard of the massacre of their fellow Americans several days before, so they then massacred these German soldiers. This man wanted to be forgiven for his part in that event. I guess our Bicentennial had reawakened those memories, and, the courage provided by the alcohol, led him to call me. Well, you can’t receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation over the phone, and sadly he didn’t accept my invitation to receive that sacrament in person.

I have thought a lot about that conversation over these past forty-seven years. In his Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:38-39, Jesus says, ***You have heard it said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,*** ***but I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on [your] right cheek, turn the other one to him as well.*** What a horrible example an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth we have in those Malmedy executions, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth which leaves the both of us blind and toothless. Jesus calls us to do more when he says, ***Offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on [your] right cheek, turn the other one to him as well***, but Jesus not only asks us to do more but also enables us to do more which is why he gives to us the gift of the Holy Spirit. How easy it is to breathe of the “spirit of the age” rather than breathing of the Holy Spirit. While the Malmedy executions are a dramatic example of breathing of “the spirit of the age,” the age being World War 2, it is so easy for us to do the same in our own time: to breathe of “the spirit of the age” rather than to breathe of the Holy Spirit.

Who is the Holy Spirit? Theologically speaking, the Holy Spirit is the personified love of the Father for the Son, a love that unifies and bonds the Father to the Son; and on Pentecost Jesus lavished that same embodied, personified love upon us his Church. The question for us is: do we take the time to breathe deeply of that same embodied, personified love we call the Holy Spirit, or do we rather breathe of the “spirit of the age,” in this case the spirit of revenge, opting to seek an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?

With this Feast of Pentecost, we conclude our observance of the Season of Easter. The Paschal Candle will no longer be here. As of this Monday, the liturgical color of vestments at Mass will be green. No more sprinkling with holy water. Also this lava lamp will disappear. Please remember as I explained in my Easter homily, this lava lamp is a good summary of the message of Easter, that the Death and Resurrection of Jesus is like the bulb in this lamp influencing the whole lamp, the whole lamp being our lives with the gold flecks being the beautiful things in our lives which reflect God’s love for us, and the water in which these gold flecks are swimming as being like God’s love for us in which we are always swimming. Though this lava lamp will be put away with all of the other Easter decorations, we cannot put away the message of Easter. We need to always let the Death and Resurrection of Jesus influence everything about us and everything in our lives just like the bulb of this lava lamp influences everything about this lava lamp. Most especially we need to remember and celebrate that we are always swimming in God’s love, that we are always swimming in the Holy Spirit.

If we take the time to remember that breathing of the Holy Spirit is as vital and important as our breathing of the air and if we take time to let every conscious breath we breathe be a request to God to fill us with himself and his Holy Spirit, then we will be able to resist “the spirit of the age” and will be more and more filled with the presence of God himself.