



## In Joy and Hope

by

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### A wonderful celebration of Pentecost with the Swinomish

I have celebrated the Feast of Pentecost in various settings and with different people throughout my life. Pentecost is one of my favorite feasts of the Church year. The liturgy offers powerful images to convey the significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit almost two thousand years ago. Water, fire, wind - these are poetic images which announce the gift of the Holy Spirit.

However, last weekend I had one of the most powerful experiences in my life for the Feast of the Pentecost when I celebrated the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Paul's Mission in Swinomish. Swinomish is in the Skagit Valley and could possibly be overlooked as people travel through this valley each year when the tulips bloom. However, year-round, there is unparalleled beauty and life present in this part of the Skagit Valley. It is found in the life and faith of the Swinomish people and St. Paul's Mission community.

#### Remembering the past

I have to admit that I was somewhat apprehensive when Fr. Pat Twohy, S.J., who ministers to the Swinomish people, told me about the plans for the celebration last Sunday. It would begin with a re-creation of the first missionaries arriving by canoe to this site 125 years ago. As a result, I vested in black cassock, got in the canoe, and had a magnificent experience of doing what Oblate priests did in 1867. After we landed, a beautiful new wooden cross was erected at the site and there was a blessing of the four corners of the earth. We then proceeded with the Blessed Sacrament through the town to the church where we celebrated the Mass of Pentecost.

Drums were used in the procession, and reminded me of the image that the drum is the heartbeat of a people. There was a gentle breeze last Sunday morning, and the altar candles flickered. During the canoe trip, I felt the power of the water under the canoe. The images of water, fire and wind for the Holy Spirit were very powerful for me last Sunday morning.

#### A time for reconciliation

I could not help think about the great gifts which the first missionaries shared with the Native American people. But the Native American people also shared, and continue to share, powerful gifts with our society. As we plan to remember the fifth centenary of the coming of Europeans to this land, it would be good for us to recall the suffering of native peoples that followed the arrival of explorers and wave after wave of immigrants.

Last year, the bishops of the United States issued a statement regarding the Fifth Centenary. At the beginning of these reflections, the bishops wrote, "As church, we often have been unconscious and insensitive to the mistreatment of our Native American brothers and sisters and have at times reflected the racism of the dominant culture of which we have been a part. In this quincentennial year, we extend our apology to our native peoples and pledge ourselves to work with them to ensure their rights, their religious freedom, and the preservation of their cultural heritage."

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### **A time for action**

In a special pastoral reflection on the Fifth Centenary and Native American people, the U.S. bishops emphasized how important it is "to recognize and act upon the Native American dimensions of our ongoing advocacy regarding health, housing, employment, education, poverty and other national issues. No group is touched more directly by federal policy than Native Americans. We must be alert and active regarding federal policies that support or undermine Native American lives, dignity and rights. As a church committed to a 'preferential option for the poor and vulnerable,' we recognize that Native Americans are often the most poor and vulnerable in our midst. We shall actively support initiatives to meet housing, health and employment needs of native people, with a priority for measures that increase self-sufficiency and economic empowerment."

There is no doubt that this year's celebration of Pentecost was a powerful experience for me. Thank you to St. Paul's Mission community for making it such. I have a new appreciation of the images of the Holy Spirit as living water, fire and wind. May God's grace and peace be yours.