

“Caffeinated Christianity.”

Acts 2:1-21

Whenever a sports franchise tears down an old stadium and builds a new one; or when they at least opt to remodel their existing stadium, there is typically a rush of fans who are eager to purchase any remnants of the old stadium that may be made available to the general public. Old seating, a metal sign from the concession stand, a medicine bottle of dirt from one of the end zones or the infield; these are all examples of what many people are only too glad to open their wallets and shell out money for. These are seen as having tremendous value.

Sports loyalty in America is something that permeates our national consciousness. Why would someone willingly sit for three hours at Lambeau Field in December or January? Why would a person buy a bus, paint it in team colors, equip it with a grill and beverage cooler, and then drive it all around the country tailgating at their team’s road games? Why do we wait for hours on end outside of a practice facility or players entrance, just for the chance to catch a glimpse of someone who can run the 40-yard dash in four seconds?

We are a nation of sports nuts and admittedly, I am just as guilty of it as the next person. Many of us here are that way.

Is there anyone who has had as much passion as Coach Vince Lombardi? Lombardi was fanatical about his players following team rules, because according to his coaching philosophy, that was what would give the Packers the best chance to win. Many Packer players under Vince Lombardi have likened his summer training camps to being incarcerated. According to Coach’s rules, their whole life for those six weeks was to be football and nothing else!

When the team was on the road to play an away game, Coach Lombardi always imposed a strict curfew. He required his players to be back in the hotel and snoozing away in bed by a certain time, because he wanted them to be ready to play a football game the next day.

Lombardi never went to bed until each of his players were in bed. He would wait up for them and hide behind big, potted plants in the hotel lobby and then spring on them like a big bird if they came in even one minute past curfew! Sometimes a player would offer an excuse, but Lombardi would hold up a hand and say: *“You can stop now. I’ve heard it all before.”* Then he would proceed to administer a chewing-out like only Vince Lombardi could give.

Passion is the energy that fuels sports franchises. It is the energy that

wins games. Football without passion is about as effective as coffee without caffeine. It might give one a warm feeling momentarily, but it doesn't have any "oomph" behind it. (No disrespect intended to decaf drinkers!)

Pentecost is not about sports of any kind, and it is not really about coffee -- despite the sermon title. Pentecost, rather, is about the "oomph" behind the church. It is about that mysterious energy that has driven and sustained the church for nearly two thousand years.

What we know as "Pentecost" was actually a Jewish festival. The Hebrews called it the "Festival of Weeks" and it took place fifty days after the Passover. In fact, the word "Pentecost" comes from a Greek word meaning "fifty."

On that Pentecost that we read about today, the city of Jerusalem is filled with Jews who have come from miles around to celebrate the festival. It is prescribed in the Book of Leviticus and in Deuteronomy; each person was to bring to God a special offering in proportion to his income.

All work was to be set aside. No one was to work during this time, and that included not only the Jews but also all people who were in town with them.

Then, while the disciples were gathered together a sound like a violent wind came from heaven. This was the coming of the Holy Spirit!

The writer of Acts says that tongues of fire appeared among them and a tongue rested on each of them.

Then they each began to speak in other languages. And, these were earthly languages. These were the mother tongues from each of the nations that were represented in Jerusalem that day.

This was a birthing unit delivery! Someone was being born! And that someone is **the church**. Not our local church only and not our denomination only, but the Church of Jesus Christ in every time and place. Of every language and culture. Of every race and of both genders.

The beauty of that Pentecost when the church was born, is that *everyone* was called into the church. Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Kibel, Cappadocia, and Howard's Grove. Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia. Egypt and Chicago, and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Madison and Rome and Atlanta, Georgia -- both Jews and Proselytes, Cretans and Arabs. Plymouth, and New Holstein, Budapest and Tokyo.

Pentecost is a reminder that God has called *everyone* to be a part of this community we know as "the church."

I remember when I was in the Marine Corps, there was a Navy Chaplain in our regiment who was a Roman Catholic Priest. I used to attend

that his Masses because of his homilies (sermons). He was a good preacher of Holy Scripture, a good teacher of the faith. So, I went in order to receive the Ministry of the Word.

I remember one of the first few times that I did that, after he and I had become acquainted. When it came time for the Eucharist (Communion), all of the Catholic boys went forward and I just remained respectfully in my place in the pew until it was finished. Being a Protestant, I knew that I couldn't receive the Sacrament in a Catholic Mass.

At some point during that time, the Priest glanced up at me and said: "*David, you know that you can receive Communion, too.*" I was startled. I replied, "*But I'm not Catholic! I'm not allowed to!*" He then smiled and asked me, "*David, you confess the Apostle's Creed, don't you?*" I replied, "*Yes, Father.*" Again, he asked: "*And, you are a sinner, are you not?*" I answered, "*Yes Father, THAT I am!*"

Waving me forward with his hand, the Priest said: "*Then you should be in line here too. Come on up.*" So, I went forward and received Communion along with everyone else.

It is God's desire for the Church of Jesus Christ to be one. Pentecost -- the church's birthday -- is a reminder of that.

But is it possible? Yes, it is if we are willing to yield our will to God's will it is entirely possible! Jesus Christ died and was raised in order to knock down every barrier that stands between us and God. Christ came into this world for all people, and it is through Christ that we can come to God.

On Pentecost we remember that it is the Holy Spirit that gives us the ability to believe (1 Corinthians 12:3b). The Holy Spirit is the engine that has powered the church for the past twenty centuries of our existence. The Holy Spirit is the "caffeine" in the "coffee" that is Christianity. The Holy Spirit is the "oomph" that empowers the church to be the church.

The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost and is present on the earth to this very day. All we need to do is surrender our will for God's will. It is THEN that we are the church.

AMEN.