

Reflection for the Feast of Pentecost

Have you ever tried to figure out how many times you have sung the song *Happy Birthday*? I think that most of us would come to the conclusion that we have sung *Happy Birthday*, more times than we can remember. For most of us the *Happy Birthday* song is a part of the memories of our Birthdays and the Birthdays of our loved ones. This simple song helps connect us to our families, our Community and our world. The celebration of one's birthday is an opportunity to give thanks to God for the life He has given us and to remember our experiences in this world.

It is interesting to note that according to the 1998 *Guinness World Records*, the Birthday Song is the most recognized song in the English Language. The song's lyrics have been translated into 18 languages. The song is traditionally attributed to American sisters Patty and Mildred J. Hill dating back to 1893. Currently the song is in the public domain in the United States. Previously Warner Chappell Music had claimed a copyright on the song, but in 2015 the copyright was declared invalid. It is strange to think that someone would claim to own the song, for this song seems to be owned by everyone for it is a part of our collective memory.

In celebrating a birthday with or without singing *Happy Birthday*, a person is not just remembering or commemorating the day he or she is born. The celebration of a birthday is an opportunity to thank God for the life one has and to take time to remember one's life journey and to look forward to the future. One of my fondest memories I have growing up is celebrating my Grandmother's birthday. As a family we would always bake a cake and have on the cake a candle for each year of her life. We would sing her the *Happy Birthday* song and wait for her to blow out the candles. One year my oldest sister used some trick candles for the birthday cake and my Grandmother was such a good sport that she continued to blow out the candles when they would relight. After the cake was served my Grandmother would share a couple of stories about her life, and that was my favorite time of the celebration.

The stories that my Grandmother shared were always about adventures that she and my Grandfather had. Before my Grandfather passed away they had been married for over 40 years, so my Grandmother had plenty of stories to share. As I think of the stories that my Grandmother shared about her life with her husband, not all the stories were about joyful times. Some of the stories were about the war years and other challenging moments they experienced in their 40 plus years of marriage. But no matter the story my Grandmother shared about her life, she always seemed to find the blessing of family and God's active hand in her life in all the stories she shared.

This Sunday we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church. I am not suggesting that we should have a Cake with 1,988 candles, and that we should sing happy birthday to the Church. Maybe we should take some time and remember the stories of our two thousand year old Church. Some of these stories are very joyful, some are filled with great challenges but all focus on the family of believers and God's active hand in the life of the faithful. If you are wondering how I came up with 1,988 candles for the Pentecost cake, Christ was born 2021 years ago and after His mission on earth was completed He ascended to his Father and our Father in the year 33. The coming of the Holy Spirit was 10 days after the Ascension of the Lord so the number of candles would be 1,988.