

Back in 1982 I spent Christmas in Kenya. I was a student in Rome, and a couple friends were going to Africa for the semester break. I asked if I could go along, and we all had a great time. We spent four days “on safari” – shooting wild animals with cameras, not with guns, and four more days on their beach, where, typical for me, I got sunburned.

Kenya has some of the most beautiful landscape I have ever seen. It is hard to describe how lovely it was to see wild animals in their natural habitat. The people were kind and welcoming, very polite to us visitors. I returned from that trip thinking how wonderful it would be to go back to Africa sometime, but doubting that I would ever have reason to do so.

Little did I know that Cameron, Missouri, was going to become a gateway to Africa. Sister Rita Tofflemire, originally from St. Munchin Church, is working at a hospital now in Tanzania, and she has put us in touch with Father Melchior Kambona and the people of Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Marambo. Next week I will visit Tanzania together with Maureen Foster and two members of Sister Rita’s family from here – Liz Leach and Karen Chaney. On my way there I will spend a few days in Uganda to visit our old friend Fr. Aloysius Kasoma. Both these priests have visited us over the past few years, and now I will return a visit to bring them greetings from all of us.

I expect we’ll return from this trip inspired by the faith of these people, concerned about the poverty and illness they face, and amazed at how beautiful other parts of the world are. It will be a pilgrimage that should touch our lives, and we are already anxious to come back and share our stories and experiences with you.

Now, you don’t have to go to Africa to experience how wonderful God is. Especially at this time of year in Missouri, we witness the miracle of crops growing beneath the rain and the sun, the abundance of wildlife in the woods, and the joy of water in fishing holes and swimming pools.

Perhaps it was sights like these thousands of years ago that inspired the writer of today’s psalm to sing, “How manifold are your works, O Lord! The earth is full of your creatures.” We sing this psalm on Pentecost, the day we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit, because the psalm talks about the breath of life or the spirit of life that God imparts to all creatures – and that God ultimately takes away. One of the verses says, “If you take away their breath, they perish and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.” So we sing a refrain asking God to do just that, “Lord, send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.”

As we conclude the Easter season and begin summer, whatever plans you have – a trip to Africa or a trip across the street – let us be grateful for the breath of life, and let us ask God to keep sending us the Spirit of Pentecost, so that we can continue to grow in our gratitude for life in all we say and do.