

Pentecost Sunday May 15, 2016

Acts 2:1-11; Romans 8:8-17; John 14, 15-16; 23b-26 (John 20, 19-23)

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended with power upon the Apostles in the image of tongues of fire and thus began the mission of the Church in the world. Once they received the Spirit, they went out boldly and preached to all in Jerusalem and elsewhere. Jesus himself prepared the Eleven for this mission, appearing to them on many occasions after his Resurrection. Prior to his Ascension into Heaven, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father; that is, he asked them to stay together to prepare themselves to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The disciples followed the command of Jesus. They as a community gathered together in prayer along with Mary in the Upper Room, awaiting the promised event. It is here they all received the Holy Spirit. This feast of Pentecost is the culmination of the Paschal mystery which tells us of the sending of the Spirit of the Father and the Son on the disciples. Today's feast also indicates that the Holy Spirit is an ongoing reality, which still touches our lives every single day. During his apparitions Jesus gives two gifts to his followers, the gift of his abiding peace and the power to forgive sins. He commissions them to carry on his work, empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit and peace. The Holy Spirit will continue to teach them the message of Jesus.

Today is also the birthday of the Church. This Sunday is a commemoration and celebration of the receiving of the Holy Spirit by the early church. The Church is basically that community and complex of communities spread all over the world which is continuing the visible presence of God and his work by living openly in the Spirit of Jesus and offering its experience of knowing Christ to the world. We celebrate this day to recognize the gift of the Holy Spirit, realizing that God's very life, breath and energy lives in believers. The celebration reminds us of the reality that we are all having the unifying Spirit that was poured out upon the first disciples. It tells us that the same Spirit is given to each one of us, that we are all baptized by one Spirit into one body and that the Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead will raise us too. We are given a graphic picture of Pentecost with the tongues of fire and the multi lingual discourses. The Gospel reminds us that Jesus came to the disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us that the Spirit was hovering over the universe even before the creation. In reality none of them contradict. They are one and the same reality and the actual space and time is not important for us to understand the working of the Spirit.

After his resurrection Jesus appears to the disciples. It was indeed a surprise for them to see him alive. Suddenly the same Jesus was there among them. "Peace with you," was his greeting. It was both a wish and a statement. Where Jesus is present there is peace. The presence of Jesus in our lives always brings peace and removes our anxieties and fears. Then he gave them their mission: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Their mission and his were exactly the same. Our mission and his are exactly the same. He then breathed on them just as God breathed on the earth and created the first human being. He gave the Holy Spirit as the Gift of God who restored the image that God had put in man at his creation. Now in Christ, we too become a new creation. The breathing also symbolizes the Spirit of God and of Jesus. So he said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." With the giving of the Spirit came also the authority to speak and act in the name of Jesus. "If you forgive sins, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." This was not just a reference to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the power to forgive sin. Forgiving sin, reconciling people with God has been the very core of the work of Christ and the Christian mission. The disciples are now the Body of Christ, the ongoing visible presence of Christ in the world. This Body will experience injuries and wounds and disease... It will wander at times far from God. It will need healing and forgiveness and reconciliation. It will also try to bring the same healing and reconciliation to a broken world.

After his Resurrection Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Father's gift of the Holy Spirit, from whom they would receive power to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. He taught them the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. He finished his discourse by stating that the Holy Spirit will declare to the disciples the things that are to come. He will glorify Jesus, declaring to the disciples the same teachings that Jesus had taught them during his ministry on earth. The Holy Spirit will teach them the divine knowledge and wisdom of the Father that belongs to Jesus, both the Father and the Son being one in the Blessed Trinity. After his ascension to heaven, the men returned to Jerusalem and joined together in prayer in an upper room. On the Day of Pentecost, just as Jesus had promised they received the Spirit. It came in the form of a violent wind that filled the house and the tongues of fire came to rest on each of them. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, they were given the power of preaching and healing and they spoke in tongues. Thus having received the Holy Spirit, the disciples went out and preached the message of Jesus.

Pentecost means fiftieth day. It was the second of three great Jewish Feasts. For the Jews it was a day of gratitude. It was a day of thanksgiving for the

completion of the harvest. However, on this day a great transformation took place in the small group of disciples. They were persons perplexed, scared, dumfounded and disappointed, that kept them closeted in a little upper room. Rightly, we are not told where that room was situated. We only know that room was in a house in Jerusalem and people had come to Jerusalem from every nation to express their harvest gratitude. They spoke different languages; they came with different intentions; they had different motives. It is this motley group who witnessed a sound that made them assemble together. To their astonishment, some Galilean spoke to them in their own native language. To their surprise, some unheard of illiterates spoke the language they understood so well. We all know how difficult it is to learn another language. Yet we are told that these disciples spoke and people, coming from various nations, understood them. It is the hearers and not the speakers who make this claim! This was the novel experience of the new harvest, Pentecost! Indeed as St Paul tells us that no one can say, "Jesus is Lord" unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Today's First Reading from The Acts Of The Apostles tells us that the promise of Jesus been fulfilled. While staying with them, He had ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. In obedience to Jesus, the disciples gathered together in Jerusalem and experienced the divine sign. The disciples did receive the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day. The arrival of the Holy Spirit came with a sound like the rush of a violent wind. So powerful was the sound that it was also heard by devout Jews from every nation under heaven who were living in Jerusalem. It is interesting to note here that not everybody heard the sound, only the "devout" Jews. The non-believers and those who are indifferent to their living faith are not receptive to the grace of God and the manifested power of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit arrived, divided tongues, as of fire, rested on each of the disciples. This is the Biblical sign of the divine presence. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability. As such, the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit is not only working through those who speak in tongues, but only through those who hear, each hearing in his own language. They could experience the presence of Jesus in his language, namely the language of Love.

Today's Second Reading from the Letter of Paul to the Romans, tells us that those who are in the flesh, they cannot please God. He says that if they live according to the flesh, they will die; but if they exist by the Spirit, they will have to put to death the deeds of the flesh, and they will live. This is because those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but

those who live according to the Spirit, set their minds on the things of the Spirit. We as Christians must allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit to be qualified as children of God. Through our faith in Christ and the Sacrament of Baptism, we received a spirit of adoption so we may qualify to be called children of God and heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ. To inherit these titles, we must be ready to suffer with Christ so that we may also be glorified with Him. Therefore St Paul tells us that by allowing the Holy Spirit to sanctify us in Christ, we will have new life. The Spirit will continue to dwell within us.

The Gospel of John tells us: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Here we have the mission of Jesus: He greets the disciples with the traditional salutation and then asks them to continue his work. He breathes on them and gives them the Spirit and confers on them the power to forgive sins of people. He tells them: "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." The baton is being passed. They have a job to do and it is exactly what Jesus himself came to do - to establish the Kingdom on earth. In Greek the word for 'breath' and 'spirit' are the same. The breathing recalls God breathing life into the dust and bringing the first human being into existence. Here too there is a kind of new creation, as the disciples are re-created into the 'new person' that Paul will speak about in his letters, a person filled with the Spirit of Jesus and mandated to continue his work. Their work is specifically explained. They are to be the reconcilers in the world. "For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained." This is their job, to be agents of God to bring reconciliation between God and Man and Man and Man. Reconciliation means the healing of wounds, of all forms of division. This is the work of the Kingdom. It is what we are called to do. This role of reconciliation is the special gift of Jesus through the Spirit to perform the divine task. Christ promises that he would continue his care of his disciples. This Spirit will open to them the mysteries of God. Jesus and the Father gave us the Holy Spirit so we may be sanctified.

Jesus tells his disciples that those who keep his Words are privileged to enjoy the indwelling of the fullness of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, which will come and make their home in them. The gift of the Spirit is a fruit of Christ's mediation, bought by his merit, and received by his intercession. The word used here, signifies an advocate, counsellor, monitor, guide and comforter. He would abide with the disciples to the end of time; his gifts and graces would encourage their hearts. The expressions used here and elsewhere, plainly denote a person, and the office itself includes all the Divine perfections. The gift of the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon the Disciples of Christ, and not on the world. This is the favour God grants to his chosen people. If we

receive gifts as the disciples received gifts on Pentecost, it is for the benefit of the whole Body of Christ. Through the growth of the Body of Christ, we grow alongside the other faithful members of the Church.

The church tells us of the seven gifts of the Spirit. The Seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are the following: Wisdom - desire for the things of God, and to direct our whole life and all our actions to His honour and glory. Here we see God at work in our lives and in the world. Second, Understanding - enables us to know more clearly the mysteries of faith. It perfects a person's speculative reason in the apprehension of truth. Third, Counsel - warns us of the deceits of the evil one, and of the dangers to salvation. With the gift of right judgment, we know the difference between right and wrong, and we choose to do what is right. Fourth, Fortitude (courage) - With the gift of courage, we overcome our fear and are willing to take risks as a follower of Jesus Christ. It strengthens us to do the will of God in all things. Fifth, Knowledge - With the gift of knowledge, the Spirit enables us to discover the will of God in all things. Sixth, Piety (Reverence) - With the gift of reverence, sometimes called piety, we have a deep sense of respect for God and the church. And finally the seventh, Fear of the Lord (awe of God) - With the gift of wonder, prayerful respect and awe we are aware of the glory and majesty of God. A person with such awe and wonder has perfect knowledge, perfect goodness, perfect power, and perfect love.

Today's feast rounds off the tremendous mysteries that we have been commemorating since Holy Week - the Passion, the Death, the Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus culminates in the sending of the Spirit of the Father and the Son on his disciples. As has been said previously, we are not dealing here merely with separate historical incidents but with one reality - the extraordinary intervention of God into our lives by what we can only call the "mystery" of Christ. And today's feast indicates that it is an on-going reality, which still touches our lives every single day. This week, let us reflect upon the purpose of the Holy Spirit in the Church. He can guide and teach us according to the purpose that He has been sent by the Lord God.

The Little Prince on his journey into the world reached the earth. As he went he found merchant selling pills and many were coming to him to purchase those pills. The Little Prince was curious and went to him and asked him what these pills were. He replied that these were the thirst pills. What is their purpose, asked the Prince. The Merchant told him that they were extremely good and scientifically produced. Is one swallows a pill then for the entire day he need not drink any water. He added that calculations have been made that for a week one can save 27 minutes of his time. What he was to do with the

27 minutes asked the Prince. The merchant said he could do anything and work or do any reading. The Little Prince replied and said: "If I had those 27 minutes, I will walk to the fresh water spring and drink water from the fountain."

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