

Pentecost Sunday May 24, 2015

Acts 2:1-11; Gal. 5:16-25; or 1Cor12, 2-13, Jn. 15:26-27, 16:12-15 or 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. All the disciples gathered in prayer with Mary in the Upper Room, awaiting the promised event. Today is also the birthday of the 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. 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. The Holy Spirit will continue to teach them the message of Jesus. In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles we have the narrative of the arriving of the Spirit on the Apostles. These timid people are transformed as they receive the power from the Spirit to and preach publicly about Jesus. In the second reading Paul speaks of the gifts and the power of the Holy Spirit. They are the spiritual actions and they lead us into the holiness of God.

Pentecost which means fiftieth was the second of three most important Jewish Feasts. For the Jews it was a day of gratitude and a day of thanksgiving for the completion of the harvest. It occurred seven weeks after the Passover and on this day the first fruits of the wheat crop were offered to God. On this day people celebrated the event where God gave his Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. On this day the Spirit came down on the Disciples and the church was born. On this fiftieth day after the resurrection a great transformation took place in the small group of disciples. They were persons perplexed, scared, frightened and disappointed, that kept them closeted in a little upper room. We are not told where that room was situated and we only know that room was in a house in Jerusalem. The Spirit that descended on them while they were together praying and it was for all the people. At this time 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 mixed group that heard a sound which made them assemble together. To their astonishment, some Galilean spoke to them in their own native language. They were surprised that some unheard illiterates of Galilee spoke the language they understood so well. All are aware how difficult it is to learn another language. Yet we are told that these disciples spoke freely and people, coming from various nations, understood them perfectly. It is the hearers and not the speakers who make this claim. This was the novel experience of the new harvest, Pentecost. Just as St Paul tells us that no one can say, Jesus is Lord unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost day is called the birthday of the Church. The Apostles had already received the Holy Spirit on Christ's first appearance to them after the resurrection. The Gospel from John presents us with a different account of the coming of the Spirit. It was Easter Sunday. The disciples were locked into the house, terrified of the authorities coming to take them away as collaborators with the recently executed Jesus. 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.

Today's First Reading from The Acts of the Apostles tells us that obedient to the command of Jesus, the Apostles remained in Jerusalem awaiting the gift of the Holy Spirit. They spent their time in prayer and under the leadership of Peter they had chosen a person to replace Judas who had parted their company. While on earth Jesus 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. Now the promise of Jesus was fulfilled. The disciples did receive the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day. It was like the repetition of the first creation where breath of God gave life. Luke initiates the new creation and the introduction of the age of the Holy Spirit as the dominant reality of humankind. The arrival of the Holy Spirit was accompanied 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 were not receptive to the grace of God and the manifested power of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit arrived in the form of 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 and could reach anywhere through their message. As such, the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit was not only working through those who spoke in tongues, but also through those who heard, each hearing in his own language. They could experience the presence of Jesus in their language, namely the language of Love.

Today's Second Reading from the Letters to the Galatians reminds us how the persons baptized for Christ should conduct themselves once they have received the gift of the Holy Spirit during the Sacrament of Confirmation. Paul advised his community that they should live by the spirit and must not look to gratify the desires of the flesh. He reminds the church that since they have been born again through faith in Jesus and the Sacrament of Baptism and have received God's gift of a new heart and spirit, they belong to God. Therefore they are called to embrace the spiritual ways of the spirit. They are called to live a holy life as children of God. As such, they are not to gratify the cravings of the flesh and not to embrace the worldly ways that serve the purpose of the worldly desires. For what the flesh desires are opposed to the spirit and what the spirit desires is opposed to the flesh. For these are opposed to each other, to prevent them from doing what they wanted to do and should be doing. He enumerates fifteen different vices to which our fallen nature is prone. These are opposed to

the Spirit. They cause havoc in the lives of dedicated Christians. Paul encourages them to say that with the help of the Spirit they can overcome the desires of the flesh. He enumerates the nine gifts that the Spirit produces in the Christians. These are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these. If we perform these spiritual actions, it will not be held against us because we are walking in holiness towards God.

In the Gospel of today Jesus tells us that when the Advocate comes, whom the Lord will send to his disciples from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on behalf of Jesus. An Advocate as we understand is like an honest lawyer who defends and supports someone's cause. He is a true champion who encourages, supports and upholds the rights of the person. He advances, promotes and recommends the cause of the individual. He urges the person to persevere in his beliefs. This description of the Holy Spirit as an Advocate perfectly described His personal interest in our spiritual well-being. When Paul instructs the Romans he says that as children of God, when we pray and we cry, Abba! Father and it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God. The Holy Spirit always pleads for us to receive the graces the Father will shower on us. He supports us in the perseverance of our living faith in Christ. John also tells us in his epistle that Jesus is our advocate for if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. Certainly this is not conflicting word of Jesus who says that the Holy Spirit is our advocate. This is because both, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are One God. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and he is also the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Father. Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit, being one in God, are our Advocates before God the Father.

The Gospel passage taken from the last discourse of Jesus at the Last Supper continues with the instructions of Jesus to the disciples, as he tells them that they are to testify because they have been with him from the beginning. Jesus invites them to testify on his behalf because they had lived with him, shared his life and his ministry, they had listened to his teachings, taken part in his miracles, were the witnesses to his life, sufferings and death. They had now experienced the glory of his resurrection. With his passion and death before him Jesus told them that he still had many things to say, but they would be unable bear them now. Therefore he gave them the assurance that when the Spirit of truth comes, he the Holy Spirit would guide them into all the truth. When taking the entire context of the instructions that Jesus was giving, it is realized that these specific instructions were given to his disciples who were called to administer on earth the Catholic Church that Jesus had just instituted. When Jesus said that the Spirit of truth will guide you into all the truth, this particular reference was meant for the apostles and to the early Church. Further Jesus said that he the Spirit will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears. Again, these words echo the word of Jesus who does not speak on his own, but speaks what he hears of the Father. In these words, we perceive the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity where one Divine Presence of God cannot contradict the other two Divine Presences. All three are in perfect harmony. Jesus 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.

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.

The feast of Pentecost rounds off the tremendous mysteries that we have been commemorating since Holy Week - the Passion, the Death, the Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus. This feast culminates in the sending of the Spirit of the Father and the Son on his disciples. This feast indicates the extraordinary intervention of God into our lives by which Jesus makes us partakers in the mystery of the Trinity. 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 for which he has been sent. Through the power of the Spirit we ask for the grace to be forgiven and the grace to forgive others. Today Jesus fills us with the same Spirit to send us out on his mission to preach, reconcile and to heal.

It was said the Pundit Bholabhai was on a vacation in the countryside. He rented a big house near a Bird sanctuary. A variety of birds sang merrily outside his window all day long. Bholabhai was so thrilled that every time he stepped out of the house, he thanked the birds loudly for their enchanting melodies. One day the landlord followed him out and protested saying: "you don't suppose those birds are singing for you?" Bholabhai asserted saying: "Why of course, I do." The Landlord reacted saying: "Well my friend, you are sadly mistaken; the birds are singing only for me." They got into such a serious argument that they decided to settle it in the court. The Judge heard the case carefully, and then to their utter amazement, asked each of them to pay a penalty. Surprised at this both demanded why they have to pay. The Judge replied solemnly: "Because, the birds here have always been singing only for me."

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