

PENTECOST SUNDAY June 8, 2014

Readings

- * **Acts 2:1-11** – First wonderful fruits of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
- * **1 Cor 12:3-7.12-13** – The Holy Spirit makes the Church one.
- * **Jn 20:19-23** – The Risen Christ gives the Holy Spirit to his Apostles.



Theme: THE TRANSFORMING AND UNIFYING ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We live in a divided world, torn by conflicting interests, one faction or one nation often pitted against others, in an endless quest for hegemony, or liberation from so many forms of enslavement. Such is the tragic inheritance of original sin, and of the deep divisions that have in the tower of Babel their perennial symbol. Such is the result of man's selfishness, aggressiveness, pride, and greed.

Left to ourselves, we are unable to overcome such powerful destructive forces. That is why the Lord Jesus

promised and gave us the Holy Spirit, as the divine healing Power which can undo the tragedy of division and mistrust created by our sinfulness, and fashion us into a beautiful family of nations, races, and cultures. In this "new mankind" created by the Spirit, both joys and sufferings are shared in brotherly solidarity and love. Let us open our hearts to him as we sincerely long for his coming into our lives and in our society.

FIRST READING – Acts 2:1-11

Structure

- * **1-4** – The descent of the Holy Spirit and the first effect of his presence in the disciples
- * **5-11** – The reaction of the people present in Jerusalem

Historical Background

An outpouring of the Spirit was one of the "signs" of the messianic times. (See *Is 2:2* and *Jl 3:1-5*.) John the Baptist had foretold that the Messiah would baptize his followers "in the Holy Spirit and fire." (See *Mt 3:11*.) Jesus himself had repeatedly promised that he would

send another "Helper" or "Advocate." (See *Jn 15:26; 16:7.13*.)

These promises/prophesies were fulfilled during the Jewish feast of Pentecost when the people of Israel celebrated the gifts of the Covenant and of the Ten Commandments.

Introduction

The beginning of the second chapter of the Book of Acts contains the account of the *transformation* produced by the Spirit in the apostles and the *unifying effect* which their preaching had on all those who heard them. On that occasion, the Spirit began to reverse

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the process of estrangement that had started when the first human beings gave in to the devil's temptation, and which found its dramatic manifestation

in the episode of the Tower of Babel. (See *Gn 3 and 11:1-9*.) The "time and mission of the Church" has officially begun.



Acts 2:1-11

¹ When the time for *Pentecost* was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. ² And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. ³ Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. ⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. ⁶ At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷ They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? ⁹ We are *Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya* near

Explanatory Notes

Pentecost (v. 1): An important feast in the Jewish calendar. It was observed fifty days after the Passover, and it commemorated the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai.

Parthians (v. 9): Members of one of the several ethnic groups who lived in present-day Iran.

Medes (v. 9): A people living on the Iranian plateau. Eventually, in 553 BC, under Cyrus they formed one powerful kingdom with the Persians.

Elamites (v. 9): Inhabitants of Elam, a region that lay East and North East of the valley between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers.

Mesopotamia (v. 9): The fertile area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Judea (v. 9): The Southern region of Palestine whose capital city was Jerusalem.

Cappadocia (v. 9): A Roman province in the eastern part of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey).

Pontus (v. 9): A Roman province in NE Asia Minor (present-day Turkey).

Asia (v. 9): (In the New Testament) A province of the Roman Empire, limited to the western part of present-day Turkey.

Phrygia (v. 10): A region in NW Asia Minor.

Pamphylia (v. 10): (Greek word which means "all tribes") A region on the South coast of Asia minor.

Egypt (v. 10): The land in northeastern Africa which was the seat of the most ancient civilization in the Middle East.

Libya (v. 10): A region in North Africa between Egypt and Tunisia, along the Mediterranean Sea.

Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.”

Values/Counter-values Discovery

1. What values or counter-values can I find in this Biblical passage?
2. What related values or counter-values can I find in our society and culture?

God's Word in My Life

1. Am I aware of the transforming effect of the Holy Spirit in my life?
2. How open am I to his action in me?
3. Write a prayer to the Holy Spirit or enumerate his gifts and fruits.



SECOND READING – 1 Cor 12:3b-13
(Liturgical Text – 12:3-7.12-13)

Structure

- * **3b** – Role of the Holy Spirit in a person's faith
- * **4-6** – Unity in diversity
- * **7-11** – Different manifestations of the Spirit in the Church
- * **12-13** – One body, one Spirit

Corinth, reminding its members of the duty they had to be united because they were all members of one body (Christ's) enlivened by one Spirit.

Introduction

In today's passage, St. Paul emphasizes the *enriching* and *unifying* role of the Holy Spirit by presenting him not only as the common origin of the different "gifts" (see vv. 6, 7 and 11), but also as the one who directs the use of these gifts to the "common good" (v. 7), i.e., the building up and the sanctification of the Church, mystical body of Christ.

Historical Background

The community of Corinth was plagued with dissensions and divisions – a mirror of the situation of humankind under the power of the devil. Worried by such situation, the Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the community of



1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

Brothers and sisters:

- ^{3b} **No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.**
⁴ **There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit;**

Explanatory Notes

Cyrene (v. 10): The main city on the coast of Cyrenaica, a region of northern Africa in the north-eastern part of present-day Libya.

Judaism (v. 11): The religion of the Jews whose main tenets are God's revelation through the prophets, their moral teaching, and the hope in the coming of a Messiah.

Cretans (v. 11): Inhabitants of Crete, a large island south of Greece, in the Mediterranean Sea.

Arabs (v. 11): Inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula.

⁵ there are different forms of service but the same Lord; ⁶ there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.

⁷ To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. ⁸ To one is given, through the Spirit, the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; ¹⁰ to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.

¹² As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or *Greeks*, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Values/Counter-values Discovery

1. What values or counter-values can I find in this Biblical passage?
2. What related values or counter-values can I find in our society and culture?

God's Word in My Life

1. How appreciative am I of the role of the Holy Spirit in my life?
2. What special gifts has the Holy Spirit given me?
3. Have I been using them for the common good or only for my own benefit?
4. Can I say that the Holy Spirit is alive in me?



GOSPEL – Jn 20:19-23

Structure

- * 19-20 – Jesus' first apparition to his disciples
- * 21 – He makes them share in his mission.
- * 22-23 – Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to the Apostles to empower them to forgive sins.

his disciples were gripped by the fear that they might be treated the same way. In addition to this, their conscience bothered them because they had deserted their Master during the critical moments of his arrest, trial, and execution. Dispirited and remorseful, they had locked themselves up in the Upper Room, where Jesus had spent with them the last hours of his mortal life. Having lost their self-esteem, they

Historical Background

After the dramatic death of Jesus,

Explanatory Note

Greeks (v. 13): Converts from paganism to Judaism. They worshipped the Lord though they did not belong to the Jewish race. In this context, the word "Greeks" stands for all non-Jews.

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had become the perfect symbols of helpless, sinful mankind . . .

Introduction

Today's Gospel passage shows that *Jesus' love for his disciples was unconditional and "desertion-proof."* This is why, instead of leaving them in their fears and remorse, the very day of

his resurrection, he manifested himself to them in an attitude of *forgiveness, trust, and generosity.* Such a life-giving disposition is clearly shown in his giving them the gifts of:

- *peace,*
- *participation in his mission;* and
- *the Holy Spirit.*



John 20:19-23

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst of the disciples and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Mastering the Text

1. Why had the disciples locked the doors of the place where they were staying?
2. What did Jesus do immediately after greeting them?
3. How many times did Jesus wish "peace" to his disciples?
4. What did he do immediately before giving them the Holy Spirit?
5. Express in your own words the implications of Jesus' words in giving the Holy Spirit to his disciples for the forgiveness of sins.
6. In what sacrament does the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit reach us in a special manner?

Jesus' resurrection, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the forgiveness of sins?

Discovering the Message

1. On which day of the week did the Risen Christ appear to his disciples?
2. Why did they rejoice when they saw him?
3. Which are the *three gifts* given by Jesus to his disciples in his first apparition to them?
4. What is the relationship between

Values/Counter-values Discovery

1. What values or counter-values can I find in this Gospel passage?
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God's Word in My Life



1. Did I ever feel like the disciples

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| before the apparition of the Risen Lord? | 2. Am I aware of the role of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Penance? |
| What was the cause of my condition? | How do I cooperate with his healing action? |

REFLECTION ON THE THEME

Jesus freed us from sin through his passion, death, and resurrection.

Thanks to him, salvation is made available and offered to all human beings. But this does not mean that we are all herded into heaven. Christ destroyed sin, but not our freedom. It can still happen that we say once again “No!” to God.

As long as we live on earth, sin remains a “possible accident” caused by a number of factors, the main ones of which are the devil’s temptations, the negative influence of the environment in which we live, and especially the moral weakness of our wounded nature. ***Experience shows that sin remains a sad reality to this very day, both in ourselves and around us.***

Jesus knew it would be so. That is why he repeatedly promised and eventually gave the Holy Spirit to the Church that she might continue his healing mission in the power of the Source of all unity, wholeness, and holiness.

Thus, Jesus completed his redemptive work by commissioning the Church to carry on the struggle against all that divides mankind, all that makes us selfish, proud, aggressive, and oppressive.

And ***this is what the Church has been doing in her 2000 years of existence, in spite of all the limitations and weaknesses that come to her from her “human component.”*** The Holy Spirit, present in her as her “soul,” is the divine Power that keeps the Church alive, constantly renews her, guides her into an ever greater appreciation of the truths of revelation, sanctifies her, and strengthens her against all dangers and oppositions.

And ***so the mystery of the Incarnation continues – God saving men through men,*** not just through the all-holy Jesus, but also through the ministry of frail and defective people, sanctified and strengthened by the Spirit of love, unity, and holiness.

We will never be able to fully appreciate the importance to the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in each of us. Without him the Church would be just a human institution, destined to perish like all other institutions, empires and civilizations. But the Church will last until the end of time only because the Holy Spirit, the Lord of Life, animates her.

Thanks to the presence of the Spirit, the gift of salvation and all other gifts of the Risen Christ are channeled to people, especially through those sacred acts that we call “sacraments.” In particular, the forgiving love of God becomes a reality for us, today, through the sacrament of Reconciliation, which enables us to rise after every fall, purified and strengthened by God’s forgiving love.

A MOMENT WITH GOD

*Compose a prayer/commitment to God,
inspired by today’s messages/values.*

THE WEEK AHEAD

WEEKDAY READINGS

A MESSAGE FOR EACH DAY

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| Monday | 1 Kgs 17:1-6 Mt 5:1-12 | “Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.” <i>(Mt 5:11-12a)</i> |
| Tuesday | 1 Kgs 17:7-16 Mt 5:13-16 | “Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.” <i>(Mt 5:16)</i> |
| Wednesday | Acts 11:21b-26; 13:1-3 Mt 10:7-13 | “As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons.” <i>(Mt 10:7-8)</i> |
| Thursday | 1 Kgs 18:41-46 Mt 5:20-26 | “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” <i>(Mt 5:23-24)</i> |
| Friday | 1 Kgs 19:9a.11-16 Mt 5:27-32 | “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” <i>(Mt 5:27-28)</i> |
| Saturday | 1 Kgs 19:19-21 Mt 5:33-37 | “I say to you, do not swear at all. Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’ Anything more is from the evil one.” <i>(Mt 5:34.37)</i> |