

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

R¹. Alleluia, alleluia.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.

R². Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel John 20:19-23; L63B

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 their midst
and said to them, "Peace be with you."
When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.
The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit.
Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,
and whose sins you retain are retained."

or John 15:26-27; 16:12-15

Jesus said to his disciples:

"When the Advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father,
the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father,
he will testify to me.

And you also testify,
because you have been with me from the beginning.

"I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now.

But when he comes, the Spirit of truth,
he will guide you to all truth.

He will not speak on his own,
but he will speak what he hears,
and will declare to you the things that are coming.

He will glorify me,
because he will take from what is mine
and declare it to you.

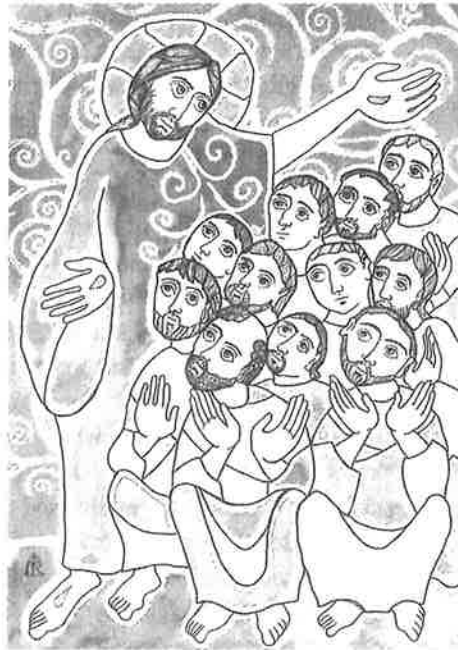
Everything that the Father has is mine;
for this reason I told you that he will take
from what is mine
and declare it to you."

Reflecting on the Gospel

The gospel read during the Mass on Pentecost day tells us of Jesus's appearance to his apostles in Jerusalem on Easter evening. He is suddenly there, even though the doors were locked, as the evangelist notes; he shows his hands and side to his disciples. Should we not connect this action with the greeting Jesus gives his disciples, "Peace be with you"? This is not an ordinary greeting. In

John's view, it is connected with the wounds, because peace flows from the passion and resurrection. (For Luke, Christ's display of his wounds was a way of assuring the disciples of his identity [see 24:39]; this is not the case for John.)

Now Christ "sends" his disciples. In doing so, he uses the kind of formula we find frequently in the fourth gospel: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (See the many other formulas in John that establish a parallel between the activity of the Father in relation to the Son and the activity of the Son in relation to his disciples: for example, 6:57; 10:15; 15:9; 17:18.) For John, however, such formulas express more than a simple parallelism; they do more than affirm the divinity of Christ on the grounds that he acts as the Father acts. They are also a theological statement that believ-



ers share in the very life that is common to Father and Son.

The formula ends rather abruptly: "I send you." He is not sending them to a place, but giving them a mission that they must carry out. What is the mission? It is that of forgiving sins, as Christ immediately makes clear. Since, however, Christ draws a parallel between his action in sending the disciples and the Father's action in sending him, he is also telling the disciples that they are to continue the work that Jesus himself has been doing for the reconstruction of the world. They too are to do the Father's work. As Jesus reveals the Father and makes him known, so the disciples are to reveal Jesus and make him known.

St. Luke tells us in today's first reading of how the Spirit came upon the disciples as they were gathered in the upper room. Luke thus puts the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost. John, however, in the gospel reading, speaks of the Spirit being given on Easter evening. Is there contradiction here between Acts and John? Has John conflated Pentecost and Easter? According to some exegetes, John is not conflating the two events, but neither is he distinguishing them; he is interested, rather, in giving expression to the paschal mystery as a unitary whole.

We should note that Luke too has an anticipation of Pentecost inasmuch as he speaks of the apostles having been chosen by Christ "through the holy Spirit" (Acts 1:2; NABRE). It seems more accurate, therefore, to say that these various actions and gifts of the Spirit (including John 20:22) were all a preparation for the definitive coming of the Spirit. When we say that the church was born on Pentecost, we are undoubtedly simplifying somewhat. After all, the church was born from the side of Christ on Calvary, while the various appear-

ances of Christ after his resurrection were so many stages in the formation of the church. The church was born on Calvary and born of his resurrection, no less than she was born of the Spirit on Pentecost. The whole first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is concerned with this gradual formation that was going on even before the Spirit was poured out on Pentecost.

We may say that St. Luke lays greater emphasis on the historical facts, while John is more concerned with the close connection between Calvary, the resurrection, the appearances, and the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: [H]e breathed on them.

To the point: Jesus, the risen Lord, enters the room in which the disciples had barricaded themselves out of fear and offers them two gifts: his peace and the breath of the Holy Spirit. This scene and these words are familiar to us, having pondered them only a few weeks ago on the Second Sunday of Easter. Today, on the feast of Pentecost, we focus on the sharing of the Holy Spirit. Like Adam, brought from lifeless clay to a creature made in the image and likeness of God with a breath, the disciples are also transformed into a new creation. With this new indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they are sharers in the life of Christ who has conquered death and darkness, and they are to bear this life to the world through their preaching, healing, and forgiving.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first and second readings: In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we find a very different description of the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Instead of the gentleness of a breath, the Spirit comes to the disciples as “a strong driving wind” and “tongues of fire.” While breath is necessary for life, wind and fire lend themselves to movement and change. Within today’s Scripture readings we are given a fuller picture of the Holy Spirit through the diverse ways it is portrayed. Just as God, the Father, and God, the Son, cannot be completely fathomed or contained by our human understanding, it is the same with the Holy Spirit. In the second reading St. Paul writes to the Corinthians to help them recognize the unity within the variety of gifts, services, and workings of the Holy Spirit that are being manifested in their community.

to experience: Whether it is acting as wind, fire, or breath, the Holy Spirit continues to animate and inspire the Body of Christ alive in the world. Which one of these images speaks to your experience of the Holy Spirit moving in your life? How do you perceive the Spirit working now within your life and the life of your community of faith?

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Today’s psalm lifts up another aspect of the Holy Spirit as an agent of renewal in the world. Within the life of creation, we see a pattern of death and rebirth constantly at work. For those of us living in the Northern Hemisphere, we celebrate the Easter season during a time where new life is appearing all around us in the form of plants and newborn birds and animals. Following the dark and cold of the winter months, the warmth and light of spring reminds us that our creator God is constantly at work “renew[ing] the face of the earth.”

to psalmist preparation: How are you experiencing or in need of the Holy Spirit’s renewing action in your own life right now?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

In today’s psalm we pray, “Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.” How do your faith community’s ministries renew the earth?

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit / is given for some benefit.” How are you using your gifts to benefit the people of God?

Jesus addresses the disciples, “Peace be with you.” How are you in need of the Lord’s peace at this moment?

Commissioning the disciples to carry on his ministry, Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” How do these words reverberate with your own faith journey?