

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

When Christians think of Pentecost, we often have the image of the disciples in the Upper Room, with the tongues of fire descending upon each before they preach to Jerusalem. But that is Luke's story in the Acts of the Apostles and he definitely has a flair for storytelling. In his telling of the Spirit's descent, he places the event on

the feast of Pentecost, a Jewish feast celebrated fifty days after Passover. Moreover, Luke has made the ascension forty days after Passover, which makes a nice bridge to this feast of Pentecost only ten days

later. He tends to objectify the supernatural, for example, he portrays the Spirit at Pentecost as tongues of fire descending on each disciple. And because he is such a good storyteller, it is his stories we remember.

But today we have John's version of the handing on of the Spirit. Interestingly, this event happens not on Pentecost, as Luke would have it, but on Easter Sunday evening! This is the same evening on which the risen Jesus appeared to the assembled disciples without Thomas. So we get our liturgical timetable from Luke, but our theology today comes from the Gospel of John.

The risen Jesus appears in the midst of the disciples, despite the locked doors. This means

not that Jesus walks through walls, as so many preachers would have it, but that he appears from his heavenly glory. For if he walked through a wall, where was he immediately prior to that? No, after the resurrection, Jesus is with his Heavenly Father, and comes from there at will. Jesus comes to be with the disciples and give them the gift of peace, and also the gift of the Holy Spirit by breathing upon them. This earthy, rather sacramental way of gifting the disciples with the Spirit is much different than Luke would have it. For him, the Spirit is a gift of God. In John's gospel, the Spirit is a gift of the Father, but given directly by Jesus.

Not only do the disciples receive the Spirit but also the ability to forgive sins. By his death and resurrection Jesus has conquered the cosmic power of sin, with a capital S. Now it is the disciples' role, and our own, to continue this mission by forgiving individual sins, almost as a "mop-up" operation after the major victory has been won. The same Spirit has been given to us, and it is our mission to forgive individual sins each time someone sins against us. Forgiveness is not limited to sacramental confession. As Christians, we are to forgive. It is a hallmark of our identity, given to us by Jesus himself.

Living the Paschal Mystery

It can be a true challenge to forgive on a daily basis. There are so many opportunities for slights, annoyances, oversights, and sometimes even deliberate harm. Something in our human nature wants to learn and remember when these things happen to us. And while we will probably never forget such experiences, we are to forgive. In so doing we continue the victory Jesus won on Easter Sunday. By our forgiving others, we advance the glorious reign of peace. This is our task, and we have the Holy Spirit to help us. Forgiving means letting go, so that the matter does not consume us from within. Forgiving does not mean the matter was OK. When we forgive we do so as much for our benefit as for the one we are



forgiving. By forgiving we are simultaneously conforming ourselves more perfectly to Christ, and dying to ourselves and our earthly cares and desires.

Focusing the Gospel

John 20:19-23

The reading for today’s gospel is the Easter night appearance of the risen Jesus before his ten disciples (remember Thomas is not present). In the Fourth Gospel, Easter night is the Pentecost event. Jesus appears even though they are hiding behind “locked doors” and greets them with “Peace”—the peace he spoke of in his final words to them at the Last Supper. As God “breathed” life into Adam in the Genesis story of creation, Jesus “breathes” the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, giving life to the new creation of the church of the resurrection. In the resurrection, the Spirit replaces their sense of self-centered fear and confusion with the “peace” of understanding, enthusiasm, and joy and shatters all barriers among them to make of them a community of hope and forgiveness.

Focusing the First Reading

Acts 2:1-11

Pentecost (“Fiftieth” in Greek) was the Jewish festival of the harvest (also called the feast of Weeks), celebrated fifty days after Passover, when the firstfruits of the corn harvest were offered to the Lord. One of the three great pilgrimage feasts (hence the presence in Jerusalem of so many “devout Jews from every nation”), Pentecost also commemorated Moses’ receiving the law on Mount Sinai. For the church, the new Israel, Pentecost becomes the celebration of the Spirit of God’s compassion, peace, and forgiveness: the Spirit of God that gave meaning and authority to the Law and the Prophets now “breathes” into the young church’s universal mission of proclaiming the Gospel (the planting of a new harvest?).

Luke employs many words and images that evoke the revelation at Mount Sinai: thunder, wind, “shaking” of the house (see Exod 19:16-19). God frequently revealed his presence in fire (the pillar of fire in the Sinai) and in wind (the wind that sweeps over the earth to make the waters subside at creation). The Hebrew word for spirit, *ruah*, and the Greek word for spirit, *pneuma*, also refer to the movement of air, not only as wind but also of life-giving breath (as God’s “breath” gives life to the “clay” as man in Gen 2 and revives the dry bones in Ezek 37). Through his life-giving “breath,” the Lord begins the era of the new Israel on Pentecost. The list of nations represented among the pilgrims is a clear sign that the Spirit of God transcends old understandings of salvation and embraces all the human family.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34 (30)

Invoking many images of the creation story in Genesis, Psalm 104 is a hymn of praise to God the Creator, whose “Spirit” sets all of creation in motion, whose “breath” animates all life.

Focusing the Second Reading

1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13

Appealing for unity among the badly splintered Corinthian community, Paul reminds the church there that the Holy Spirit’s presence in their midst should bring together the different gifts (*charismata*) that each of them possesses. No one has merited such gifts; they are all derived from the same source: the goodness and compassion of God. God gives these charisms to individuals for the good of the entire “body,” the people of God.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

The Spirit of God reveals itself in today’s readings in the forms of fire and wind (Acts 2) and breath (Ps 104, gospel). What other images can help us understand the Spirit of God working within and around us?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

How does the presence of God’s Spirit make your parish “different” from other groups and organizations?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

When have you sensed the Spirit prompting you to a specific act or moved you to act beyond your fears or doubts or out of your “comfort zone”?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What is the Spirit calling your community to take on or embrace this Pentecost?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What “truth” have you been struggling with? What do you “hear” the Spirit saying to you?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....