

THE SPIRIT WORKS IN AND THROUGH US TO LOVE AND SERVE OTHERS

April 27, 2008

6th Sunday of Easter

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“The Father will give you another Advocate to be with you always.” [Jn 14:16]

A. ACTS 8:5-8,14-17 -- The Context: Luke, a well educated Gentile convert from Antioch and a companion of Paul, wrote this work circa 80-90 A.D. to provide an historical account of the founding of the early church. [RG p 379] **In today's portion the missionary effort spreads beyond Jerusalem to Samaria.** Many Samaritans, who had their own version of the Law of Moses, were converted to the Way. In Luke **baptism and conferring of the Spirit** are one and the same event. Here is an exception. Samaritans are baptized, but the Spirit is not imparted until Peter and John (the Church) approve, come from Jerusalem and lay on hands. [RG p 386]

B. PSALM 66:1-7,16, 20 --The Context: a hymn of **joyful community praise and thanksgiving** for God's deliverances past (the Exodus) and present (an unspecified calamity.) The rescued person steps forward and **teaches the community what God has done.** [TCB 689]

C. I PETER 3:15-18—The Context: If authorship is attributed to Peter, then it must nearly fall in 64 A.D. It was addressed to Gentile Christian converts from paganism in Asia Minor. He exhorts them to keep their distance from the values of this world. [RG p. 471-472] **Today's text** helps the faithful recall that **Christ, the righteous One, by his suffering and death saved the unrighteous. By his resurrection he received new life in the Spirit,** which he communicates to believers by the baptismal bath than cleanses their consciences from sin. Hence **they should rejoice in suffering because of their hope in Christ.** [TCB 379]

D. JOHN 14:15-21---The Context:. The author is probably a disciple of the apostle John, son of Zebedee. It was composed around 90 A.D. This work announces Jesus as Messiah-Son of God. The gospel makes heavy use of symbolism; it is the product of developed theological reflection. [DB, p. 446-450] **Today's pericope** is from Jesus' last supper discourse. He consoles His followers that **he will not leave them orphans,** but will send "another Advocate" (intercessor in heaven), who is a teacher, a witness to Jesus and a prosecutor of the world **who represents the continued presence on earth of the Jesus who has returned to the Father.** V 18 **I will come to you...** means indwelling, not parousia. [TCB p.172]

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO ME PERSONALLY TODAY?

The context for today's gospel is the Last Supper. Jesus prepares his disciples for his upcoming suffering and death but also for his Resurrection and Ascension **when he will still be with them but in a very different way.**

"If you love me you will keep my commandments," Jesus says to them. The important word here is "my". **Jesus is not speaking of "the", the traditional, Ten Commandments.** These belong to the Hebrew Testament. They are still valid, of course, but **Jesus goes beyond them.** He says categorically that he has not come to do away with the Jewish law or the teaching of the prophets but rather to fulfill their inner potential. *"You have heard it said... but I say..."*

Jesus' "commandments" are on a different level. It his HIS commandments we are to keep. **What are these commandments of his? Really, there is only one and that is the commandment to love:** to love God with all our heart and soul, and to love others as we love ourselves, to love others as Jesus loves us, as he loves the sinner, as he love his enemies.

They include commands to recognize Jesus in the most needy, in the poor, in the sick, in the marginalized, even in the criminal ("I was in prison..."). They include commandments to be agents of healing and reconciliation in a broken and divided world. A good Christian is not just a law-abiding person taking care of oneself. **He/she is a loving, caring person reaching out to others in love and service.**

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As we saw in last Sunday's Gospel, the disciples are rather depressed that Jesus is going to leave them. Today he reassures them that they will not be left alone. They will certainly need help to keep those commandments of Jesus.

"I shall ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth." The word translated 'Advocate' here is in Greek *parakletos*, from which comes 'Paraclete' in our older translations of the Bible. It has the combined meanings of **Helper, Advocate, Protector, Teacher, Guide, Comforter, Consoler...**

All the above meanings are applicable to the Spirit of truth that Jesus promises to send on his disciples to be with them in all the trials that they and the Church will face. He is the Spirit of truth in the sense that **he communicates a vision of life that is totally in harmony with the vision of God himself and of Jesus.** He is a Spirit who not only informs the mind but guides us in all our decisions and actions and relationships. *"But you know him, because ... he is in you."* Only those with the vision that faith gives can recognize the presence of the Spirit within them.

Faith is a mysterious gift. It is a privilege to have received it but it also brings with it great responsibilities. Those responsibilities can be summed up in living our lives in accordance with the commandments of Jesus already mentioned.

After Jesus' resurrection-exaltation, he will be with them in a completely new way. This will happen through his new Body, the Church, the community of disciples. **Through this Body he can be everywhere in the world and at all times.** The life-source of that Body is the Spirit of the Father and Jesus, the Son. Through his Spirit Jesus continues to be really present in his Body, the Church. **And he is right here, working in us and through us. As often as we show love and compassion to the most needy of the human community, Jesus is both loving and serving and being personally served and loved.**

We can know by personal experience that *"anybody who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and show myself to him."* One gets the impression that, for far too many Christians, their "religion" is felt as a burden and that virtue consists in sticking with something that is both boring and far from being a source of joy, satisfaction and liberation.

The good disciple is much more than someone who, out of a dogged sense of duty, just avoids personal sin and tries to stay in the "state of grace". When we truly become loving persons to both friend and enemy, to family and strangers, we know that the Spirit of Jesus is living within and transforming us. Then, we are fully alive. [Frank Doyle, S.J.]

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Do I make the effort to remember God's presence in my life during each day?

How good am I at recognizing Jesus in my world and in the people around me?

How do I reach out to the needy, the sick & the poor to show them Jesus' love ?

Do I ask the Spirit to help me love my enemies and strangers as Jesus did?

[Sources: Scripture readings- **The Catholic Bible, NAB translation, Home Study Edition, (TCB), and its Reading Guide (RG); The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, [JSB]** Jewish Publication Society; **The Jerome Biblical Commentary, (JBC)** 1968 edition; **Dictionary of the Bible (DB), J.L.McKenzie, SJ; Daily Study Bible Series (DSBS), Wm Barclay, Acts, I Pt; Sunday Scripture Reflections** by Frank Doyle, SJ at <http://www.sacredspace.ie/livingspace>; 6th Sunday Easter. [Compiled by Michael Hosemann].