

PENTECOST: JESUS' PASSES HIS MISSION TO US

May 11, 2008

Pentecost Sunday

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“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” [Jn 20:21]

A. ACTS 2:1-11 -- 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] **Today's portion** chronicles the introduction of Luke's Pentecostal narrative which includes the descent of the Spirit upon the disciples & the gift of tongues. The sound of a great rush of wind heralds **a new action of God in salvation history. Tongues of fire signify the presence of God** (i.e. burning bush on Mt. Sinai). [TCB 186,187]

B. PSALM 104:1,24,29-31,34 --The Context: a hymn praising God who easily and skillfully made rampaging waters and primordial night into a world vibrant with life. **The psalmist reacts to the beauty of God's creation with awe.** [TCB 717]

C. I CORINTHIANS 12:3-7, 12-13—The Context: Written by Paul around 56 A.D. from Ephesus, this letter addresses struggles of a church living in the midst of a pagan society, shows the model of Christ as totally adequate for community living and determines the place of spiritual gifts in Christian life. [RG p 406] **Today's text** addresses the Corinthians disproportionate esteem for speaking in tongues to the detriment of order in the liturgy. Paul's response gives us **the fullest exposition we have of the theology of charisms.** [TCB p. 267]

D. JOHN 20:19-23---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. [DB, p. 446-450] **Today's pericope** tells of Jesus' post resurrection Easter Sunday appearance to the disciples crouched in terror of the Jews in the upper room. Jesus tells them that **he needs them to spread his teaching to all men, to continue his mission on earth just as the Father sent him.** [DSBS Jno 273]

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO ME PERSONALLY TODAY?

TODAY'S GREAT AND JOYFUL FEAST rounds off the tremendous mysteries that we have been commemorating since Holy Week, the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus. We are not dealing here merely with separate historical incidents but with one reality, the **extraordinary ongoing intervention of God into our lives, “the mystery of Christ.”**

It is Easter Sunday. Jesus' disciples are cowering in fear behind locked doors. They are afraid they may have to face arrest or even worse. Suddenly, there is Jesus among them. He gives them the usual Jewish greeting 'Shalom' but here it is filled with meaning. ('Peace is with you' It is no wonder that the disciples, who just now were terrified, are filled with joy. **There are two qualities that always accompany the presence of Jesus in our lives, peace and joy.**

Now comes the mission: "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." The baton is being passed. **They have a job to do and it is exactly what Jesus himself came to do, to establish the Kingdom on earth.** Jesus now breathes on them. In Greek the word for 'breath' and 'spirit' are the same. The breathing recalls God breathing life into the dust and bringing the first human being into existence. Here too there is a kind of creation, as the disciples are re-created into the 'new person', a person filled with the Spirit of Jesus and mandated to continue his work.

And how is that work expressed? "For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained." **This is their job, to be agents of reconciliation,** reconciliation of people everywhere with their God and reconciliation with each other as brothers and sisters, children of one common Father. Reconciliation means the healing of wounds, of all forms of division. **This is the work of the Kingdom. It is what we are called to do.**

Let us now turn to the second Spirit-experience as it is described in Luke's account in the Acts

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(First Reading). Here, too, there are significant elements:

a. There is the powerful wind, which, of course, is the Spirit and which, in John's gospel, is translated as "breath". **b. There is the fire** - the tongues of fire over each one in the place. This, as in the Exodus narrative, indicates God's power and presence, (OT: burning bush, pillar of fire)

And what an extraordinary result this experience had on the disciples! These men, huddled fearfully behind locked doors are almost blown from the room. **No longer afraid, they have an almost uncontrollable urge to share what they have experienced**, to share their knowledge but, even more, their experience of Jesus. Threats of prison or torture in no way intimidate them.

Together with this, they are given a power to communicate. Their message is heard and understood by all. The linguistic barriers of Babel have collapsed. This is less, I believe, a miracle of instantaneous language-learning than a way of saying that the message of Jesus is for all and can be understood by all. And this is so because, deep down, **the message of God through Jesus speaks to the deepest desires of each one's heart. "Our hearts can find no rest until they rest in you."** There is no longer a Chosen People. Or, to put it another way, **now all are God's people and all are called**. The responses, of course, will be uneven because **we are invited, not conscripted, into the Kingdom**.

What are the effects of the Spirit in our lives? That is expressed very well in the Second Reading. The Spirit is the source of the special gifts (or 'charisms') which each member of the community receives. The Source of the gifts is one, the Spirit of God and that is what unites together all those who receive them into one community. But there is a huge variety of gifts. It is important to note that the gifts are not given as a personal grace for oneself. **They are rather special abilities by which each one serves the needs of the community**. We have all to work together, using our gifts, to build up the community to which we belong.

The Spirit makes us co-heirs with Christ to "suffer with him that we may also be glorified with him". The suffering does not arise from restrictions on our freedom but because, **in our total commitment to truth, love, genuine freedom and human dignity, we are prepared to pay** any price, even, if necessary, the surrender of life itself. We could not be truly happy otherwise.

We radiate that Spirit and by our word and example invite others to share it. The gifts of the Spirit are not solely for us: they are to be shared. After the coming of the Holy Spirit, as we have seen, the disciples did not stay in that room luxuriating in what they had been given. They burst out to tell the world just how much God loves everyone and how he wants everyone to experience that love. How he wants people liberated from the destructive constraints of the flesh to an unlimited blossoming in the Spirit. [Frank Doyle, S.J.]

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Am I reconciled with my family & others? Have I healed any open wounds between us?

Have I accepted Jesus' invitation to share my faith? How will I share it?

What special gifts do I have to share with the community? How will I share them?

How well do I radiate the Spirit of Jesus in my words and in my example to others?

[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, John (DSBS)*, Wm Barclay; *Sunday Scripture Reflections* by Frank Doyle, SJ at <http://www.sacredspace.ie/livingspace>; Pentecost Sunday. [Compiled by Michael Hosemann].