

Pentecost

Year B



FIRST READING Acts 2:1–11

PSALM
Psalm 104:1, 24, 29–31, 34

SECOND READING
Galatians 5:16–25

GOSPEL
John 15:26–27, 16:12–15

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PRAYER

Psalm 104:1, 24, 29–31, 34

Bless the LORD, O my soul.

O LORD my God, you are very great.

You are clothed with honor and majesty,

O LORD, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all;

the earth is full of your creatures.

When you hide your face,

they are dismayed;

when you take away their breath,

they die and return to their dust.

When you send forth your spirit,

they are created;

and you renew the face of the ground.

May the glory of the LORD

endure forever;

may the LORD rejoice in his works—

May my meditation

be pleasing to him,

for I rejoice in the LORD.

READING THE WORD

First Reading

Acts 2:1–11

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue

rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

Second Reading

Galatians 5:16–25

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the

law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Gospel

John 15:26–27, 16:12–15

Jesus said, “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to

come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

HEARING THE WORD **“Empowered for the Mission”**

Last Sunday’s Ascension liturgy showed that the disciples were entrusted with continuing Jesus’ mission in the world. To carry out their task, they were to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Pentecost continues with this theme presenting the coming of the Spirit upon the disciples and the beginning of the Church.

The first reading narrates how the Risen Lord fulfilled his promise of the Spirit bestowing “the power from above” on the disciples. This took place on “the day of Pentecost”. Pentecost was one of the three main Israelite yearly feasts prescribed by the Torah (Exod 23:14-19). Since it was celebrated seven weeks, or fifty days, after Passover, the Israelites know it as “the festival of weeks” (cf. Exod 34:22). We call it “Pentecost” from the Greek word for “fifty”. Initially, this feast was a celebration of thanksgiving for God’s gift of grain which provided food for the body. On this day, the Israelites offered various fruits of the grain harvest in acknowledgement and thanksgiving for God’s blessings and sustenance. In time, the Israelites began to associate Pentecost with yet another great gift of God – the Sinai covenant. At Sinai, God gave the Israelites his law. Through this

act, the fugitives of Egypt were constituted as God’s chosen people. In this second sense, Pentecost was a celebration of the foundation of the Israelite nation, which God formed and would sustain in existence through the gift of his law. Through the ages, the Israelites celebrate Pentecost commemorating the covenant and God’s sustenance of his people in the material and spiritual sense.

Another significant aspect of the Sinai covenant for our understanding of Pentecost is the manner of God’s appearance to the Israelites at Sinai. Exodus 19:16-19 reports that God’s presence was manifested through the visible and audible signs of fire, blast of trumpets, violent shaking and thunder. This resembles, strikingly, the report in the book of Acts, where the Holy Spirit descends accompanied by “a sound like the rush of a violent wind”, in the form of “tongues as of fire”. It is no accident that the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples on the day of the Jewish Pentecost. In parallel with what happened on Sinai where God gave the Israelites the law and made them his special people, God’s Spirit descended on the apostles to lay the foundations for the new people of God. The Spirit would sustain the new community in existence and make it grow into God’s new people, which we call the Church.

The Spirit’s arrival laid the foundations for the Church by enabling and empowering the disciples for a

mission of witness. The disciples are given the gift of speaking in various languages which the people of all nations gathered in Jerusalem could understand. This new ability meant that the Galilean, Aramaic-speaking fishermen, were now capable of communicating the Gospel message to the entire world, far beyond Jerusalem and Palestine. They were thus enabled to fulfil Jesus’ commission to be his witnesses throughout the world (cf. Acts 1:8).

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul lays some essential guidelines for the community which came into existence on the Pentecost day. Instructing his Christians on how they should live out their faith, Paul uses the phrase “live by the Spirit”, contrasting it with “living according to the flesh”. He outlines these two contrary ways of life by drawing up extensive lists of vices and virtues. These qualities and attitudes outwardly express the person’s inner self, one’s commitments and allegiances. Thus, those whose hearts follow “the flesh” exhibit negative qualities and behaviour for all to see. Adversely, those guided by the Spirit, manifest the good and admirable qualities which enrich and edify others. By “the flesh”, Paul means the very base, self-centred passions, and ego-centric instincts. In Paul’s view, the flesh and the Spirit are two fundamentally opposed forces at work in the human heart, striving to exercise control over the person’s life. Yielding to the flesh leads to a

dissolute and debauched life. Following the Spirit has the opposite effect of an admirable and exemplary life.

Naturally, Paul points to the Spirit as the only option for Christians to follow. Belonging to Christ means “crucifying” the flesh in order to be free to follow the Spirit. For Christians, the Spirit is the new law for life, which they follow as God’s people. In Paul’s understanding, Pentecost would have been equivalent to the Sinai covenant. The Israelites on Sinai received God’s law as the rule for life. On Pentecost, the believers received God’s Spirit to empower and guide them through life.

Today’s words of Jesus come from his farewell speech to the disciples at the Last Supper. This speech was like Jesus’ testament containing his last instructions. Significant among these instructions are statements on the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus calls “the Advocate”. The Holy Spirit would play a twofold role in the lives of the disciples and the Church.

First, as the “the Spirit of truth”, he would “guide” the disciples “into all the truth”. Not all that Jesus taught and did during his ministry was understood and remembered by the disciples. In fact, the full meaning and significance of Jesus’ mission and his identity can only be fully comprehended from the view of his resurrection. Therefore, the disciples need a teacher and guide, who would ensure that they correctly understand and remember Jesus

after his death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit would fulfil this role, and lead them to a deeper comprehension of Jesus.

Second, the Spirit would “glorify” Jesus. John emphasizes that the Spirit is sent by Jesus but comes “from the Father”. These words imply that the Spirit intimately knows both Jesus and the Father, and understands their relationship. Thus, the Spirit can reveal Jesus’ true nature as the divine person. The Spirit will, therefore, reveal Jesus to the world working with and through the disciples. At that time, only a few knew and acknowledged who Jesus truly was – the Son of God. Through the Spirit’s guidance and empowerment of the disciples, the whole world would eventually hear and glorify Jesus. The Spirit makes the mission of the disciples possible by leading them to understand Jesus more fully, and empowering them to testify to Jesus as the Son of God before the whole world.

The feast of Pentecost celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit as the foundation of the Church. For Christians, the sending of the Holy Spirit is somewhat parallel to what the Sinai Covenant was for the Israelites. The Spirit lays foundations for the Christian community by enabling the disciples to proclaim the message to the whole world by the gift of tongues. The Spirit then guides the faithful as the “law written on the heart”, steering them away from the life guided by the flesh. Finally, the Spirit provides

for an on-going instruction of the faithful so that they can comprehend their Lord and his teachings ever more fully, and proclaim him effectively to the whole world. This is indeed the Spirit of life who creates and continually renews God’s people. The psalmist confirms this saying, “when you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground”.

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD

Plant two good seeds in fertile soil. Give one of them adequate water and sunshine but deprive the other of these provisions. The result, after some days, would be obvious – the one that received sufficient water and sunshine would sprout and bear fruit, whereas the other, though a good seed too, would perish in the soil. Similarly, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon a person makes a crucial difference. Like water and sunshine, the Holy Spirit gives a person the ability to sprout and bear fruits because the Spirit empowers us for mission.

Paul writes about the fruit that manifests itself in the lives of Spirit-filled persons. He writes, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”. Clearly, there is a connection between the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and virtuous living. One cannot claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit without showing corresponding virtues. The manifestation of virtues in a person’s life is what makes one a powerful

witness. There is a saying that “the beauty of a peacock speaks for itself”. A virtuous person does not need to scream to bring about conversions. His or her very life is potent enough to lead others to Christ.

When the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples with power, they received the ability to communicate: “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability”. They spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In the same way, when the Holy Spirit takes charge of our lives, he gives us “abilities”. We are empowered to exercise what is often referred to as the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The “abilities” that the Holy Spirit gives are at the service of the Gospel and not for selfish or ego-centric purposes. This point is expressed in the reaction of the crowd that had gathered, coming from different parts of the world. In amazement, they retorted, “in our own languages, we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power”. It is, therefore, unfortunate when sometimes we hear or read about so-called “men and women of God” charging a fee for the exercise of an “ability” they claim they have received from the Holy Spirit. Instead of pouring out their lives in service of God’s people, they use their “abilities” as a bait to trap unwary victims.

It is also important to note that the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples took place within the context of prayer. It is in prayer that the Holy Spirit

empowers us and virtues are born. St. Ephraim rightly said, “Virtues are formed by prayer. Prayer preserves temperance. Prayer suppresses anger. Prayer prevents emotions of pride and envy. Prayer draws into the soul the Holy Spirit, and raises man to Heaven”.

In the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, we receive the Holy Spirit. In a particular way, when we are anointed with Sacred Chrism in the Sacrament of Confirmation, we hear the words, “Be sealed with the Holy Spirit.” It is not enough to have the Holy Spirit. We must also allow the Holy Spirit to have us. It is when we allow the Holy Spirit to have us that we are empowered for mission.

PROVERB

“The beauty of a peacock speaks for itself.”

ACTION

Self-examination:

Does the Holy Spirit play any role in my life and my faith practice? In what way? How do I experience the manifestation of the gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit in my life?

Response to God:

I choose to prayerfully ponder over the expressions “Advocate” and “Spirit of Truth” as used to describe the Holy Spirit in the Gospel text. I allow the meaning of these expressions to sink deep down into my heart

and then begin to envision the Holy Spirit as my Helper and the One who leads me to the Truth that brings freedom.

Response to your World:

After carefully examining the list of “the fruits of the Holy Spirit” provided by Paul in today’s reading, I will choose one and strive to manifest it daily in my behaviour.

In our meeting we will explore new and creative ways of bringing others to share in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We begin by sharing our experiences of the Holy Spirit and seek for ways to lead others to experience them.

PRAYER

*Come, Holy Spirit. Spirit of truth,
you are the reward of the saints,
the comforter of souls,
light in the darkness,
riches to the poor,
treasure to lovers,
food for the hungry,
comfort to those
who are wandering;
to sum up, you are the one
in whom all treasures
are contained.*

Come!

*As you descended upon Mary
that the Word might become flesh,
work in us through grace
as you worked in her
through nature and grace.*

Come!

*Food of every thought,
fountain of all mercy,
sum of all purity.*

Come!

*Consume in us
whatever prevents us
from being consumed in you.*

St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi