

Pentecost Sunday A/2005

Before his Ascension into heaven, Jesus promised his disciples that he would not leave them alone and that he would be sending them his Spirit (John 14, 16. 26). Today we celebrate the feast of this gift sent by the risen Lord. To better understanding this feast we must go in the Old Testament and examine its origin. Pentecost was a very old and traditional Jewish feast, celebrated fifty days after the Passover in commemoration of the exit from Egypt. It commemorated the arrival of the people of Israel at Mountain Sinai. It is there that Moses meeting God received the Law for his people. Therefore, the feast of Pentecost was celebrated to thank God for the gift of law and for having established Israel his people among all the peoples of the earth.

We know, however, that Israel has never been faithful to that law given to them to the point of making it obsolete by the repeated violations. In this context, by saying that the apostles received the Spirit on the Pentecost, the first reading teaches one thing: for the Christians, the Spirit has substituted a new law for that of Moses. From that time forward, the new law is not anymore written on the tablets of stone, rather it is the gift of the Holy Spirit who has already shown his power in the resurrection of Jesus.

By referring to the images of fire and driving wind, which reminds us, Moses on the mountain, Luke teaches us in the first reading that the Holy Spirit is a perfect God's gift. Like a fire, he is able to burn all the negative forces and sins that prevent us to acknowledge God as our Creator and our Savior. Like a strong wind, he is able to bring about a radical change and transformation in the life of whoever welcomes him.

Not only is the Holy Spirit the new law, but he is also the force that, from within leads human to do good. He is the source of unity and wherever he enters, he destroys sin and bounds people together. In this sense, the many languages spoken by the apostles teach us that the church is universal. The Gospel is for all the peoples of the earth; the Gospel message pulls down all languages, races and barriers.

On Pentecost day we have the exact contrary of what happened at Babel. There people failed to understand others and moved away from one another; here the Spirit brings together once again the people who had dispersed. All those who allow themselves to be transformed by the word of the Gospel and by the Spirit now speak a language that everybody can understand and that can unite all together once again, that is, the language of love. It is the Holy Spirit who forms the new family of God, where all can understand each other and love one another.

If the Holy Spirit is so described, what consequence derives from such a gift? For St Paul, as he states in the second reading, the presence of the Holy Spirit

makes that each member of the Christian community is enriched by the gifts of one and the same Spirit, gifts that must not be a source of competition, but must be put at the service of unity. The many gifts and talents each of us has are not given to cause division, but to foster unity.

In this sense, those who are more gifted than others (intelligent, strong, healthy) should put these gifts to the service of others, so that the Christian community may enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit who gives to each according to his skills. There is no way of priding oneself. In other words, the particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose. Why is it so? Because they all come from the same source: *“There is a variety of gifts, but always the same Spirit”*.

To show the importance of this matter and to convince the Christians of the need of unity and reciprocal service, St Paul uses the simile of the body. The Christians make up only one body, but with many parts. Every part has its own function for the good of the whole body. The same is true for the gifts each member of the Christian community has received: they should be used and put to the humble service of the Christian community.

That the Holy Spirit has gifted us so that we may help our fellows, this goes without saying, however, the reality we face on daily basis is so different. It happens that very often instead of humbly putting our gifts and talents at the service of others, we start believing that we are “big people” and deserve more respect. And so we start despising those who are not like us. In this context, you understand the importance of the sacrament of reconciliation that Jesus gives in today’s Gospel, in order to come to the rescue of our weaknesses. (To be continued for the conclusion).



Homily Date: May 15, 2005
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Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20050515homily.pdf