

## Pentecost Sunday A/2011

Today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost or the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles. In the Jewish tradition, Pentecost was celebrated fifty days after the Passover in commemoration of the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In that perspective, this feast was mostly seen as a thanksgiving to God for the gift of the Law and the foundation of Israel as a nation. Because, as you know, without the Law, there is no nation.

This vision plays a big role in the narrative the Acts give about the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles on Pentecost. In fact, for St Luke, it is not the Law of Moses that is the foundation of Christian community, but the new law given by the Spirit of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. His action is very often invisible to the naked eyes. That is the reason why in the Acts, St Luke describes that invisible action in terms of wind and fire. Like a strong wind, the Holy Spirit can transform everything and every situation for the good of the Church and of the disciples of Jesus. Like a fire, the Holy Spirit can destroy sins and everything in us that prevents us to accept God and to recognize Jesus as our Lord.

If that is the invisible action of the Holy Spirit, what are the visible signs of his presence? First of all, the Holy Spirit gives courage and boldness to bear witness to Jesus. In fact, we know that the disciples were afraid of the Jews who condemned Jesus in the name of the Jewish Law and went in hiding. At Pentecost, all that changes completely to the point that they go out and bear witness to Jesus.

Second, the Holy Spirit is an agent of unity. He works at the unity of the Church and of the disciples of Jesus. Where he is present, human barriers scramble and people come together.

In fact, the Jewish law prohibited the Jews to have any relationship with pagans and foreigners. At Pentecost, all that changes completely so that the disciples welcome all the peoples from the known world of their time. They even address them in their own languages and proclaim to them the message of Jesus, according to the words the Spirit gives them.

As it can be seen, one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to bring people together beyond their different backgrounds, whether they be linguistic, racial, national or cultural. That is why, where people dig into conflicts and fight against each other because they are different, that could be a sign that the Spirit of Jesus is unlikely in their midst. This is true for a parish community, for family members as well as for groups of people.

This episode teaches us also that the Church is universal in its foundation. It is open to the whole world represented by those different nationalities and peoples gathered around the apostles at Pentecost. To pay attention to the universality of the Church is to welcome the differences among us as a sign of riches that come from the Holy Spirit. It is for that reason that we have to recognize and to accept

the different gifts the Holy Spirit gives to our brothers and sisters among us in order to build the Church.

The consequence to draw from such a vision is that each member of the Christian community is important and should be respected as he/she is. Because we have all been baptized in one and a same Spirit, we form one body of Christ in spite of our differences. It means equally that, although by nature we are different, in order of grace, we are all equal before God. That is why St Paul says that whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

That being said, it is good to reaffirm again that our different gifts are the manifestation of the same Spirit. If that is the case, our gifts should not be a source of competition, but must be put at the service of one another. In the same way, the many gifts and talents we have should not be a cause of division, but rather an element that contributes to the unity of the body of Christ, which is the Church.

In that perspective, those among us who are more gifted than others should put their gifts to the service of others, so that because of them, we may enjoy the abundance of the Holy Spirit who gives to each one according to his/her skills and abilities.

If we understand well this vision of St Paul, we should be just humble, modest and not proud, because we are more gifted than others. After all, what do we have we did not receive gratuitously from God? What have we done in particular so that we are more gifted than others?

It is always beautiful to say things like this; the reality, however, is more complex than that. We know by experience that very often we appropriate egotistically the gifts God has given us. We look only at ourselves and we do not care about others. Sometimes, we are so proud of our gifts that we despise those who are not like us.

Jesus, knowing the truth of our indifference and misuse of our gifts, has left us a remedy, namely the sacrament of confession. Jesus wants us to reconcile with our brothers and sisters and with him. Where we have failed to live according to his Spirit, we have to ask forgiveness and change our lives. It is only in that way that we can have his peace in our hearts. Let us not miss the opportunity to make peace with our brothers and sisters and our God through the sacrament of confession. Let us pray that Pentecost might happen in the heart of each one who seeks God. God bless you all!

**Acts 2, 1-11; 1 Corinthians 12, 3b-7, 112-13; John 20, 19-23**

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