

Solemnity of Pentecost B/2012

All the readings of this solemnity of Pentecost talk about the coming of the Holy Spirit and his role in the life of the disciples. They invite us in particular to live by the Holy Spirit and to be guided by him in what we do as a Church and a community.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke relates the event of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the early Church and the context in which it took place. He describes especially the signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit by referring to the fire and the wind in order to express the power of purification and the transformation of life that the Spirit brings. He also highlights the fact that the event had a big impact on the disciples and the crowd of people gathered in Jerusalem on that day for the celebration of the commemoration of the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

For the first time and through the working of the Holy Spirit, the word of the Lord was proclaimed to all the people and each one could hear God's marvels spoken in his own language. That day brought together Christians and pagans to a same table of the word of the Lord at the surprise of many of them.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the gatherer of his people through the power of the Holy Spirit. As he gathered the disciples in the beginning in spite of their different backgrounds, so does he gather different nations into one people by the outpouring of his Spirit. Therefore, what divides people, like language or citizenship, cannot be an obstacle to God's project to bring all under one leadership of Jesus Christ.

Given such an impact of the Holy Spirit, it is in the interest of the disciples of Jesus to listen to his impulse rather than to themselves. That is why St Paul insists in the second reading that we follow the Spirit in our lives rather than the desire of the flesh. To follow the Spirit means to give rise to a holy way of life which is recognizable in the practice of virtues like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, etc. To follow the desire of the flesh means to lead a disordered life in which the Spirit is absent. Such a type of life is recognizable by its immorality, impurity, lust, idolatry, hatred, fury, etc.

All that helps us understand the stakes of today's Gospel as Jesus is talking about the Spirit he will send from the Father on the apostles. First of all, Jesus declares to his disciples that when the Advocate will come, he will testify to him and help the disciples, too, to testify.

Although Jesus has a lot to tell his disciples, he cannot bring everything out for the time being, because they are unprepared and unready. But, when the Spirit will come, he will tell the whole truth about him. What the Spirit will say will come from Jesus as well as from the Father, because what belongs to the Father belongs to the son, and vice versa.

What do we learn from these readings? The first thing I want to talk about is the chance of having an Advocate. Jesus says in the Gospel that when the Advocate, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will testify to me and you too will testify. First of all, what does an Advocate mean? According to the Webster Dictionary, an advocate is one that pleads the cause of another before a tribunal or a judicial court.

In modern terms, such a person would be what we call a Lawyer. If that is the case, it means that the Holy Spirit is our Lawyer. The role of a Lawyer is well known to each

one of us. He has to defend the client so that he might be acquitted in case he/she has a problem before the court. He has to find the extenuating circumstances that can allow the judge to acquit the accused or to lessen his/her guilt. He has to testify and convince the jury that his/her client deserves better in the matter under examination.

In that perspective, it is clear that the Holy Spirit is our defender. Human experience, however, has taught us that one thing is to have a Lawyer and another is to have a good one. In the Holy Spirit, we have both a Lawyer and a good one. That is why where the Spirit of Christ is, there things are sure. It is, then, the Holy Spirit who helps us bear witness to Jesus before the world and others. Without the Holy Spirit we cannot stand and talk about Jesus.

All that explains why at the beginning of the Church, while the disciples were persecuted for the sake of Jesus, they did not deny their faith in him, but rather stood firm and continued to talk about Jesus. The strength to do so and the courage to carry out their duty in spite of persecution did not come from them, but rather from the power of the Holy Spirit.

If the Holy Spirit is our lawyer, then, we have to listen to him and his recommendations. It happens sometimes, in civil society, that the Lawyer imposes a line of directives on a client if he/she wants his/her case to be successful. In the same way, the building up of our relationship with Jesus depends also on how we follow the directives of his Spirit.

The second thing I want to highlight is about the content of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Spirit bears witness to the truth of the Revelation about Jesus, namely that Jesus is not only a man, but he also is God. Therefore, by accepting him, we accept God; by listening to him, we listen to God; by rejecting him, we reject God.

The Holy Spirit also bears witness to the relationship of interdependence and reciprocity that exists between Jesus and himself, between Jesus and the Father and between the Father and himself. That is the reason why Jesus says that he will not speak on his own, but of what he hears. He will glorify him, because he will take what is his own and declares it to the disciples. After all, everything that the Father has is his and vice versa.

Lastly, the Holy Spirit bears witness to the unity and the universality of the Church by destroying the barriers that human beings erect between one another. That is the reason why at Pentecost the Church gathered the people of all nations and languages in one people of God, listening to the deeds of God each one in his own language. In that perspective, unity is a sign of the presence of the Spirit and division is a sign of his absence.

Let us, then, pray that the Spirit of Jesus may guide us to the whole truth about him. May Jesus find a place in our hearts and the Church follow always the impulse of the Spirit!

Acts of Apostles 1: 1-11; Ephesians 1: 17-23; Mark 16: 15-20



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