

Feast of Pentecost Vigil Mass A/2014

All the readings of this Pentecost Vigil focus on the presence of the Holy Spirit and his function in the Church. They invite us to open our hearts to him so that he might lead us to a true adoration of God.

The first reading describes the prophecy that God made to the prophet Joel to give his spirit to his people. It portrays in particular what will happen when the Spirit will come on the children of Israel by showing how old men and young people will prophesy, have dreams and visions. Then, the text shows that on that day God will work wonders and signs everywhere including in nature. It also shows that God will exercise his power by rescuing all those who call upon his name.

What is behind this text is the idea that the spirit of God is a transforming force of individuals and their natural environment. There is also the idea that, where the Spirit of God is present, things cannot remain the same as they were before, because everything will be changed for the best.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the Spirit that his disciples will receive from his Father. The Gospel highlights in particular the fact that the Spirit will be a source of abundant grace and blessings for God's people.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Let me start this way. As human beings, we all have qualities and capabilities. It is those qualities and capabilities which are displayed in our skills and professional aptitudes. Anytime we show some competence and ability in a given domain, we display our qualities and capabilities.

However, we know by experience that, in spite of our skills and competence that people sometimes admire, we have also some limitations. We know that, though people respect us because of our competence and capabilities, we are not totally and completely perfect in everything we do. There are always some imperfections in us. It even happens that our imperfections can be such that they become a major obstacle to our own development and for our relationship with others.

If that is true in our daily experience with others, how much more can it be, on a spiritual level, for our relationship with God? It is here that we have to understand the importance and the role of the Holy Spirit as presented in today's readings.

First of all, the Holy Spirit is one of the persons of the Holy Trinity. This evocation alone is already an indication that the virtues which are attributed to the Father and the Son belong at the same time to the Holy Spirit, so that what is said of the Son and the Father can be equally said of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is an agent of perfection who brings God's work to perfection in people and in creation.

Second. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "Advocate", which literally means the one who defends the cause of the other; the one who supports and promotes the interest of another; the one who helps in time of trouble and necessity.

In that perspective, it is understandable that, without the help of the Holy Spirit, we can fail in many ways to respond adequately to God in our life. Positively, it means

that the Holy Spirit is the “fruits-producer” who helps us be fertile in God’s works. He is like “a compensation” or “an aid” we receive from Jesus so that we are capable of acting and living according to God’s rules, because left with ourselves our imperfections can have the best of us.

All this description is evinced in the readings of this Vigil. For instance, the prophet Joel points out that when the sons and daughters of Israel will receive the Spirit, they will prophesy and have visions; those who invoke the name of the Lord will be rescued from their trouble.

If we understand well this prophecy, it means that without the Holy Spirit we cannot come to invoke God, as well as we cannot receive God’s insights beyond our natural knowledge.

It is the same thing that St Paul says in the letter to the Romans when he states that “The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groaning. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the holy ones according to God’s will”.

Anytime that things have been difficult for us and suddenly, to our astonishment, we make it, it was the Holy Spirit who cleared things for us. In other words, the Holy Spirit helps us do things that we cannot do with our own strength. He works through our weakness in order to make us strong and performant for the glory of the Holy Trinity.

It’s important, however, to remember that the Holy Spirit will never push us to undertake actions that are against Jesus or his Church. I say this because people sometimes justify their actions by saying that their conscience told them. In truth, we better make sure that we are listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit and not the voice of our own desires. And we know which is which by checking this voice against the truth of God’s Word.

That is why it is also important to remember that the Holy Spirit does not act magically. We have to be open to him with our heart. We have to be attentive to his insights so that we grow in the knowledge of Jesus and adjust our life to the reality of God’s children.

Let us long for the gift of the Holy Spirit in this of the feast of Pentecost. Let us ask God to pour out the Holy Spirit in our hearts, so that we may be able to renew our life by the strength of his grace. May we listen to the insights of the Holy Spirit instead of our own desires! May God bless you all!

Joel 3: 1-5; Romans 8: 22-27; John 7: 37-39



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