

## Sixth Sunday of Easter A/2014

The readings of this sixth Sunday of Easter talk about the growth of the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. They show us that the Church is made up of different peoples, but all form one people of God. They invite us to long for the Holy Spirit that can build our unity as the people of God.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles describes the missionary work of Phillip in the land of Samaria. It shows how the Samaritans believed in his teaching and how miraculous signs accompanied his message. It shows also how, in order to validate the unity of the whole Church as a body, the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John down to pray for the Samaritans and impose hands on them for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

What is behind this text is the idea that Jesus Christ is the savior of the whole world and not only of one nation. Another idea is that, like his founder, the Church is one, but made up of different people. The last idea is related to the Holy Spirit who is the power that holds all the peoples of God together in unity in Jesus Christ.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus speaks about the Spirit he will give to his apostles to be with them before returning to his Father. First of all, the Gospel mentions the declaration of Jesus to his disciples in which he indicates that the one who loves him should keep his commandments. Then, Jesus says that by doing so, he will ask his Father to send them an Advocate, the Spirit of truth, to be with them always so that they do not stay orphans.

After that Jesus says that the disciples already know the Spirit because he is with them and in them. Then, he confesses that, though the world will not see him anymore, the disciples, on the contrary will, because he is alive and the Father lives in him and he in his disciples. The Gospel ends up with Jesus declaring that whoever loves him will be loved by his Father too and he will reveal himself to him.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the permanent presence of Jesus in the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Each one of us, in fact, has had this wonderful experience that when we live with people, we end up being so accustomed to them that they become part of our life. Their presence is so meaningful to us that our life would not have sense at all if they did not exist.

This experience, in which most of the couples can recognize themselves with regard to their life with their spouses, can help us understand what is going in the mind of Jesus before his ascension to the Father. In fact, Jesus has loved totally and unconditionally the disciples. He taught them everything he received from his Father to the point that he did not count them as slaves, but rather as friends.

On the other hand, however, Jesus knew that he had to return to his Father in spite of all the love he bore for his disciples. In such a case, the sadness of the disciples would

have been big to lose such a support and to face the challenge of mission alone. It is in that context that he promised that he will not leave them orphans, but rather he will ask the Father to send them another Advocate, the Spirit of truth, in order to be with them and assure them of his permanent presence.

In ordinary language, “Advocate” means a helper, that is, someone called in order to help in time of need and trouble. It means also someone who supports, defends and promotes the interest of another. In modern terms, we would say that the Holy Spirit is our lawyer. He is the one that Jesus leaves with us in order to defend us and tell us the truth of Jesus Christ that leads to eternal salvation. In that sense, the Holy Spirit takes away our inadequacies and enables us to cope with life in the footsteps of Jesus. He helps us be attentive to Jesus’ commandments without which it would be difficult for us to walk in God’s path.

So, even if physically speaking, we cannot see Jesus with the eyes of our body, he is present in our midst through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are not left alone with our problems and difficulties. In each problem we have in this world, Jesus is with us in an invisible way. When sometimes we triumph over our difficulties, it is not because of our skills, but because of Jesus’ help.

However, in order to live in good relationship with Jesus, we have to be obedient to him. I believe that it is the reason why Jesus talks about the importance of keeping the commandments as a condition for a true friendship with him and the reception of the Holy Spirit. In fact, without keeping the commandment is like denying the friendship with Jesus. It is like a rebellious child who does not listen to his parents or respects them, but rather lives his life as it pleases him. His disobedience destroys his relationship with his parents. That is exactly what Jesus wants to say.

On the contrary, to keep Jesus’ commandments reinforces our relationship with him. It manifests our love of him and our faithfulness to live by the teaching he has received from his Father. It is also for that reason that Jesus says that “whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him”.

After all, the bottom line is the problem of love. As human experience teaches us, it is impossible to observe someone’s precepts if we do not love him. The lack of love creates, on the contrary, rejection and repulsion. The more we love someone, the easier we find the way to deal with what he is asking of us. If we love Jesus, his Father will love us in turn and they will both dwell in us and fill us with the Holy Spirit. Let us, long, then, for the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we come to please God and walk in his paths. Let us ask the Lord Jesus to make us obedient to his commandments so that we live in him and he in us. May God bless you all!

**Acts 8: 5-8, 14-17; 1 Peter 3: 15-18; John 14: 15-21**



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