

Pentecost Sunday Mass of the day A/2017

The readings of this Solemnity of Pentecost talk about the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and his role in the functioning of the Church. They invite us to open our hearts to the gift of the Holy Spirit and to live by his insights so that we please God.

The first reading recalls the event of the day of Pentecost and the effects of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first community of the Church. It shows how, as the disciples were gathered together, the Holy Spirit came upon them under the form of tongues of fire.

It also shows how, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they started speaking in different tongues of the mighty acts of God. Finally, the text highlights the astonishment of the different people who were gathered in Jerusalem for the feast and who heard them speaking in their own tongue.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is capable of unifying various peoples into one, in spite of their linguistic, racial, cultural or national differences. Another idea is the affirmation of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The last idea is related to the recognition of the action of the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of the Gospel to the world.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus is giving the Holy Spirit to his disciples. First of all, the Gospel states that the doors of the place where the disciples were hiding were locked when Jesus appeared to them. Then, it says that Jesus wished them peace and showed them his scars. Finally, it reports on the gift of peace that Jesus gave to the disciples as well as the authority to forgive sins in his name.

What do we learn from these readings? Today I want to talk about the power of the Holy Spirit. Before entering deep in the subject, let me remind us what we already know about the Holy Spirit, namely that he is one of the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

Though he is distinct from the Father and the Son, he is nonetheless of the same nature with them. He lives in communion with the Father and the Son. He proceeds from the Father and the Son and, with them, he receives the same adoration and the same glory.

The Holy Spirit can appear in different forms or manifestations. In the case of the baptism of Jesus, for instance, he appeared under the form of a dove. However, in the case of the first Pentecost, as we heard in the first reading, he appeared under the form of fire. Sometimes, there is no way of recognizing his invisible and mysterious presence than by the gifts he inspires.

In all the cases, the Holy Spirit manifests his presence as the power of God through which people are invested with special gifts and spiritual strength to lead a type of life beyond human capacities and to always act according to God's will and for his glory.

Those gifts are of two kinds. Some, like wisdom, understanding, counsel, piety, fortitude, knowledge and fear of God, are destined for the sanctification of the person who possesses them. That is what we read in the book of the prophet Isaiah 11: 2-3. Others, we would call charismas, are extraordinary favors given by God in order to help other people or the Church. As we heard in the second reading, St Paul dedicates the whole chapter 12 of the first letter to the Corinthians to those charismas.

That the Holy Spirit is the power of God that allows people to live beyond human capacities is a fact we find well described in the first reading. In fact, the crowd of the pilgrims assembled in Jerusalem at that moment was astonished to see the disciples coming out and speaking openly about Jesus.

And yet, we know that following the death of Jesus, the disciples went in hiding because of fear of the Jews. Suddenly, they went out and started talking about Jesus. That change came from the power of the Holy Spirit who gave them courage to speak and bear witness to Jesus.

Moreover, each of the different people could hear the disciples speaking in the language of their nation of the mighty acts of God. How would such a phenomenon be possible if it were not through the power of the Holy Spirit?

Because the Holy Spirit is the power of God, he manifests his presence by the transformation he operates within people and anything he touches. That is how he transformed the disciples from fearful people to courageous witnesses of the death and the resurrection of Jesus. That is how he operates in the sacraments of the Church by making our salvation effective through our confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

As St Paul says, “the manifestations of the Spirit are given for some benefit”. If that is true, then, it means that we complete each other by the gifts we have. Therefore, we cannot despise those who are not like us or who are less gifted than we are. On the contrary, we have to learn to appreciate each other because it is of the will of God that we are who we are and possess what we have.

Moreover, there is no doubt that we are different from one another, as well as we come from different backgrounds. Because of those differences, our ways of being, acting and living are also different. And yet, in Jesus Christ, we are called to become the one people of God, the community of the believers, sharing in the same faith and living the same commitments before God and his Church as we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Therefore, we have to be careful for the way we present ourselves to others or treat them. Our individualities or particularities should not become an obstacle to forming the one people of God. Of course, there is no denial of individual riches and particularity; what is at stake is the fact that in order to become a people of God, we need to hold to what unites us rather than what divides us.

That is why it is important to listen to the Holy Spirit speaking within us because after all, he aims at uniting people rather than dividing them. May he help us build a strong community in which we are all witnesses of the risen Lord! May the Holy Spirit help us through the celebration of the Pentecost recognize our gifts and our sins so that we are forgiven by the Lord! May God bless you all!

Acts of the Apostles 2: 1-11; 1 Corinthians 12: 3b-7, 12-13; John 12: 19-23



Homily Date: June 04, 2017
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Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20170604homily.pdf