

Sunday 4th June 2017: DAY OF PENTECOST. YR. A

Gospel: John 20:19-23

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Acts 2: 1-11

Jesus breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit . . .”

John 20: 19-23

There was a very fat nun who dearly loved her food. She was cautioned by the Mother Superior on the subject of greed. ‘Remember,’ she was told, ‘the Bible says that we are temples of the Holy Spirit, and therefore we should respect our bodies and show restraint.’

For a while the lesson apparently went home and it was noticed that the nun ate much less than before. But then, alas, it became obvious at meal times that she was back to her former ways. Again, she was on the carpet for a reprimand. ‘You seem to be forgetting what I said about being temples of the Holy Spirit sister,’ said her Superior. With a beatific smile the nun replied, ‘Well, it was while I was praying the other day Mother, that I seemed to hear a voice that said, ‘Sister, you are not a temple of the Holy Spirit, you are a basilica.’

“Gracious God - bless now the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts. Breath your Spirit into us and grant that we may hear and in hearing be led in the way you want us to go. Amen.”

Pentecost was the Jewish festival of the harvest (also called the Feast of Weeks), celebrated 50 days after Passover, when the first fruits of the corn harvest were offered to the Lord. A feast of pilgrimage (hence the presence in Jerusalem of so many “devout Jews of every nation”), Pentecost also commemorated Moses’ receiving the Law on Mount Sinai.

For the new Israel, Pentecost becomes the celebration of the Spirit of God's compassion, peace and forgiveness – the Spirit that transcends the Law and becomes the point of departure for the young Church's universal mission (the planting of a new harvest?).

In his Acts of the Apostles (Reading 1), Luke invokes the First Testament images of wind and fire in his account of the new Church’s Pentecost:

God frequently revealed his presence in fire (the pillar of fire in the Sinai) and in

wind (the wind that sweeps over the earth to make the waters of the Great Flood subside). Through his life-giving **“breath,”** the Lord begins the era of the new Israel on Pentecost.

Today’s Gospel of the first appearance of the Risen Jesus before his ten disciples (remember Thomas is not present) on Easter night is John’s version of the Pentecost event. In **“breathing”** the Holy Spirit upon them, Jesus imitates God’s act of creation in Genesis. Just as Adam’s life came from God, so the disciples’ new life of the Spirit comes from Jesus. In the Resurrection, the Spirit replaces their sense of self-centred fear and confusion with the **“peace”** of understanding, enthusiasm and joy and shatters all barriers among them to make of them a community of hope and forgiveness. By Christ’s sending them forth, the disciples become *apostles* – **“those sent.”**

The feast of Pentecost celebrates the unseen, immeasurable presence of God in our lives and in our Church – the **Spirit** that animates us to do the work of the Gospel of the Risen One, the **Spirit** that makes God’s will our will, the **Spirit** of God living in us and transforming us so that we might bring his life and love to our broken world.

God **“breathes”** his Spirit into our souls that we may live in his life and love; God ignites the **“fire”** of his Spirit within our hearts and minds that we may seek God in all things to realise the coming of his reign.

Today we celebrate the gift of God’s Spirit: The Spirit that enables us to love as selflessly and as totally as God loved us enough to become one of us, to die for us and to rise for us; the Spirit that takes us beyond empty legalisms and static measurements of **“mine”** and **“yours”** to create a community of compassion, reconciliation and justice centred in **“us”**; the Spirit that enables us to re-create our world in the peace and mercy of God.

In Jesus’ **“breathing”** upon them the new life of the Spirit, the community of the Resurrection – the Church – takes flight. That same Spirit continues to **“blow”** through today’s Church to give life and direction to our mission and ministry to preach the Gospel to every nation, to proclaim the forgiveness and reconciliation in God’s name, to baptise all humanity into the life of Jesus’ Resurrection.

The Spirit of God enables the Eleven – and us – to do things they could not do on their own: to understand the **“truth”** of God’s great love for his people that is embodied in the Risen Christ, and then to boldly proclaim the Gospel of Christ.

The Spirit empowers us with the grace to do the difficult work of Gospel justice, forgiveness and compassion.

The miracle of Pentecost (Acts 2) is the Spirit’s overcoming the barriers of language and perception to open not only the minds of the Apostles’ hearers but their hearts as

well to understanding and embracing the Word of God.

We here today are a Pentecost People. The Spirit has been and is being poured out upon us. The gift of God is just below the surface in our minds and hearts, and to the right and to the left of us - above us and below us, to the front and to the rear.

Amen