

June 9, 2019

Pentecost

There are three possible Gospel texts for the Feast of Pentecost. The first, John 7:37-39 is for the Vigil Mass. Either John 14:15-16, 23b-26 or John 20:19-23 are texts for Masses on the Feast.

John 7:37-39 (For the Vigil Mass)

On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.'" He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Background:

This reading is especially appropriate because Pentecost is the last day of the Easter Season—the season when most adults and children are received into the Church through the waters of baptism. During this season, many communities invite their members to remember their own baptisms by renewing their Baptismal commitment, and then they are sprinkled with water from the baptismal font.

This Gospel text is very short. The feast that is referred to in the first verse is the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. It was the third and most favored festival on the Jewish calendar. For the feast, simple structures were built that reminded people of their dwellings during their time in the desert. The roof was typically covered with branches that would obscure the sun during the day but could be shifted to permit one to see the stars at night. The feast was celebrated when most of the harvest had been gathered. Each night the people gathered around an altar waving palm branches and the priest poured water that was brought from the pool of Siloam, thanking God for the rain that produced the harvest and for the water that flowed from the rock into the desert. It was on the last day of this celebration that Jesus stood and declared that he was the living water and invited all to come to him.

As the early Christians adopted the Jewish feast of Booths as an expression of their relationship with God, Jesus becomes the water through whom they are baptized and now have eternal life with God.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is your experience of coming to the end of a celebration, or vacation?
2. When I consider my experience of the Easter Season...
3. My experiences of being thirsty would include...
4. My experience of water that is most meaningful would be...
5. How do you hear today Jesus' instruction to the disciples "Let anyone who thirsts, come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says; 'Rivers of living water will flow from him'"?
6. When I think of Jesus' promise to be living water...
7. Can you take some time to talk to God about what God desires of you on this feast of Pentecost, your relationship to the church, or some other idea or feeling that arose within you as you heard this gospel?

John 14:15-16, 23b-26 (For the Feast)

Jesus said to the disciples: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always.

"Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me. "I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name--he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.

Background:

This gospel returns to Jesus' farewell address in the fourteenth chapter of John. The reading is meant to prepare the disciples for a time when Jesus will no longer be with them. The text focuses on love that motivates one to obedience.

The fundamental message of Jesus is self-sacrificing love, which was the heart of both Jesus' teaching and the way he lived his life. When one loves God in this manner, they are obedient to God, and both Jesus and God dwell with them.

The other theme found in this text is the relationship between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. While not a theological explanation, the text does offer some important insights. There is an intimate relationship between them, but they are distinct one from the other. The Father and the Son will dwell with the faithful, but they are distinct, for the Father has sent the Son. The Father will also send the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit comes in the name of Jesus to remind them of all that Jesus has taught them. This message of reassurance would have meant a great deal to the early Christian community whose members were struggling to understand their belief in the mist of persecution from the religious and civil authorities of the day.

Reflections Questions:

1. During this season of graduations and marriages, many are experiencing the end of significant relationships and perhaps uncertainty about the future. What has been your experience of bringing significant relationships to a close?
2. As I look toward the future, I find myself thinking...
3. How does your love for others affect what you do and what you would not do?
4. If I imagined myself as one of the early disciples after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and recalled his promise to send an Advocate, I would...
5. As you hear these words of Jesus in this gospel, what desire of yours do you hear being spoken?
6. Can you take some time to speak to God about what
7. ever it is you hear God saying to you in this text?

John 20:19-23 (For the Feast)

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (Jesus) said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Background:

The third Gospel text for Pentecost is also from John's Gospel. The text presents a different kind of experience of the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples than is found in the Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11 (the first reading for Masses on the Feast).

The disciples have gathered on the first day of the week, that same day as the resurrection. The Sabbath was celebrated on the last day of the week and looked backward to the ways God had been present throughout the Jewish history. It was also an occasion to remember what God had done in their history. The first day of the week looks forward to the week ahead. Jesus' presence with them now is not about the past events of his death and resurrection, but about what they are being commissioned to do from this point forward.

While the disciples have gathered in fear, they are sent out just as the Father sent Jesus. They have some real reasons to be afraid that those who arrested, tried, and crucified Jesus might move against them, too. However, the presence of the risen Lord is not impeded by the physical restraint of a locked door. He is the same Jesus who was crucified, and he shows them his wounds. He stands in their midst, not above or apart, and greets them with, "peace." This greeting is the common greeting of the day, and it is also a prayer for health, prosperity, and all good that comes with the end times. Jesus stands among them as the fulfillment of that greeting. Jesus breathes on them the Holy Spirit - an action that mirrors God breathing life into Adam. The disciples receive the power to both bind and forgive sins. The expression names the two extremes, like north and south, or body and blood, and it is intended to communicate the full range of power between the two extremes.

In John's Gospel, sin is defined as the refusal to accept Jesus and his teaching. By asking the disciples to be agents of forgiveness, Jesus is commissioning them to be agents to reach out to those who have rejected Jesus and his teachings.

The text seems to use the energy that is present when two opposites are brought together to describe the new energy that is released by God upon the disciples.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you know people who primarily live life for the future? Do you know people who primarily live life out of the past? Which are you?
2. Do you know people who primarily live life in fear? Do you also know people who primary life with hope? Which are you?
3. When I think of times in my life when I took a risk...
4. Signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit's presence in my life include...
5. If God is sending me into the world in the same way that the Father sent Jesus...
6. Can you take time now to talk with God about your awareness of God's presence in your life, your desire to be an instrument of peace and reconciliation for another, or the fear that keeps you locked up instead of going forward?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fsc-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Please include this information when printing or forwarding.

**Excerpts from the readings for Pentecost Sunday – June 9, 2019 – Mass during the Day
There are options for both the second reading and the gospel.**

Suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house. There appeared tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them. There were devout Jews from every nation staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They asked, "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? We hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God."

*Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth. Bless the Lord, O my soul!
You are great indeed! How manifold are your works, O Lord! the earth is full of your creatures;
May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord be glad in his works!
If you take away their breath, they perish and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.*

Brothers and sisters: No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; the same God produces all of them in everyone. To each the Spirit is given for some benefit. As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Or: Brothers and sisters: Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are in the spirit,

if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever has the Spirit of Christ belongs to him. If Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive. Consequently, we are not to live according to the flesh. If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you received a Spirit of adoption, through whom we cry, "Abba, Father!" We are children of God, and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." Then he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Or: Jesus said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always. "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will make our dwelling with him. The word you hear is not mine, but that of the Father who sent me. "I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you."

Excerpts: Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1-34; 1 Cor 12:3-13; Romans 8:8-17; John 20:19-23; John 14:15-26