

May 31, 2020

Pentecost

There are two Gospel texts for the Feast of Pentecost. The first, John 7:37-39, is for the Vigil Mass, and John 20:19-23 is for Masses during the day.

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. In the early church, this was the day when those who could not be baptized during the Easter Vigil were baptized. Baptisms were not celebrated throughout the year because the importance of joining a community was an essential part of the early Christian understanding of baptism.

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 the most favored festival that Jewish men were compelled to attend during the year. During the feast, simple structures were built that reminded the people of their dwellings during their sojourn in the desert. The roof was typically covered with branches that would block the sun during the day but could be removed so that one could 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 the water that flowed from the rock into the desert. It was on the last day of this festival that Jesus stood and declared that he was the living water, and invited all to come to him.

Reflection Questions:

1. How does creation and the events of nature influence your understanding of how God is present to you? Can you point to a particular recent experience?
2. Have there been times during this Easter Season when you felt connected to the God who has been unfolding and revealing God's self throughout time?
3. What is your experience of coming to the last day of a great celebration?
4. What is your experience of coming to the last day of the Easter Season? Is it any different this year than in other years?
5. What hopes do you bring to this day?
6. How is Jesus standing up before you and the assembly saying, "Let anyone who thirsts, come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says; 'Rivers of living water will flow from him'"?
7. What would you like to say to God about the living water flowing from you?

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 second 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 during the day). Here in the Gospel, even though the disciples have gathered in fear,

they are sent out just as the Father sent Jesus himself. They have real reason to fear that those who arrested Jesus, and crucified him, may be plotting to move against them, too. However, the presence of the risen Lord is not impeded by the physical restraint of a locked door, or their fears. The crucified Jesus stands in their midst and greets them with peace. This greeting of peace is also a prayer for health, prosperity, and all good that comes with the end times. Jesus breathes on them the Holy Spirit--an action that mirrors God breathing life into Adam in Genesis. The disciples receive the power to both bind and forgive sins, an expression that names the two extremes but 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 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.

The modern reader may associate the forgiving of sins with the Sacrament of Reconciliation. However, in the early Church, forgiveness of sin was associated with Baptism. The Reconciliation that Jesus is commissioning the disciples to be about is much larger than the personal forgiveness of individual sins. It would seem to be about the kind of reconciliations that Jesus brought to the ten lepers when he told them to go show themselves to the priest so that they could be reinstated in the community, or when he spoke to the woman at the well and the whole community was transformed by her testimony. Forgiving in this sense seems to be about restoring the fullness of the relationship.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you lock doors? Do you check to make sure they are locked at night or when you leave?
2. Are there parts of your life that you keep locked away?
3. Have you or someone you know well had the experience of being refused forgiveness by a parent or by someone they loved?
4. Where do you encounter your own fears? Which of your fears are you grateful for? Which of your fears would you like to be free of? Do you fear God?
5. In the text, the disciples thought that they had gathered in safety behind locked doors, and they discovered that they were leaving empowered by God to act, even though to do so made them more vulnerable. Has God ever worked that way in your life?
6. When have you been aware of the Jesus who was standing in your midst? How would you recognize him?
7. How do you experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in your own life? Have there been times when the Holy Spirit seemed to be present in a dramatic way, and times when the Spirit has been gently present to you... as gently as your own breath?
8. In the gospel, Jesus breathed on the disciples the breath of life, and told them they had the power to forgive and to bind sins. Can you take some time to talk to God about God's desire to give this power to his disciples, and to you?

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. The homepage is <https://fsc-calledtobe.org/>. The third 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 May 31, 2020, Pentecost Sunday (Mass during the Day)

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. Suddenly there came a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house. Then there appeared to them 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 to proclaim. There were devout Jews from every nation staying in Jerusalem. At the sound, they gathered in a crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and they asked, "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet 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! O Lord, my God, 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!
Pleasing to him be my theme; I will be glad in the Lord.
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; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, 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.

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." He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Excerpts from Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-31, 34; 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13; and John 20:19-23