

THE SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST - C

Sometimes called Whit Sunday, on this day, fifty days after the Resurrection, the Church celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church, the gift promised by Jesus to his apostles. In the gospel reading, from Jesus' words to his disciples after the Last Supper, Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit, whom he will send from the Father, as the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth or simply the Spirit. It is the Spirit who will lead the disciples into the complete truth, and glorify Jesus by making clear everything that Jesus has said. In the first reading, from Acts, we hear Luke's account of the descent of the Holy Spirit and the immediate consequences of the Spirit's arrival. The second reading from Paul's letter to the Romans tells us we are children of the Spirit and coheirs with Christ sharing his suffering so as to share his glory in the Father.

The **First Reading** is from the Acts of the Apostles. This New Testament book is part two of a history of the rise of Christianity, the first part being the gospel according to Luke. They became separated when, about 150 A.D., Christians wanted the four gospel accounts bound together in one volume. The author, Luke, is a Syrian from Antioch, a doctor of non-Jewish origin, who was a close friend of Paul accompanying him on his second and third missionary journeys. Luke collected a great deal of evidence from a variety of sources which he edited. The book deals with the primitive Jerusalem community under Peter's leadership, the spread of Christianity to Samaria, to the gentile peoples and the early days of Christianity in Antioch. From chapter 13 Luke deals with Paul's three missionary journeys and ends with Paul a prisoner in Rome.

Our reading today is from the beginning of chapter two, 2.1-11. Luke describes the descent of the Holy Spirit in fairly dramatic form and the effects are equally dramatic for, instead of remaining in that upper room for fear of the Jews, Peter and the disciples go out and preach the resurrection faith story. We are told there are 'devout men' of every nation living in Jerusalem and they all hear the disciples, each in their own native tongue, the reverse of the confusion at the Tower of Babel. Like seeds dispersed on the wind, these devout men return to their native lands carrying with them the Good News they have heard from the mouths of the disciples. The gospel message begins to spread.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 103.1,24,29-31, is a hymn about the creation of the world following the narrative in Genesis 1. The psalm opens by acclaiming the greatness of God and that the earth is full of his riches. Then we have a verse which is often used as a response, it shows our need of the Spirit for without the Spirit we die, returning to the dust from which we came but in the Spirit we are created anew and the face of the earth likewise. The psalm ends with a verse of praise of God for all his works and a prayer that we too part of his creation may be pleasing to him.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. Paul had not founded the Church in Rome but he intended to visit the Christians there on his way to Spain. This huge letter, with much detailed teaching, is difficult to summarize. The community in Rome was a mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish converts and there was a danger that they would look down on each other. Some of the converts from Judaism wanted pagan converts to be circumcised to ensure their salvation. Paul maintained this made nonsense of Christ's redemptive work. The Law was good and holy but made those who kept the Law aware of their need of God's help. This help has now been given in Christ Jesus which is explained in some detail.

The reading, 8.8-17, comes from the second section of the letter which deals with salvation and having spoken about our deliverance from sin and death Paul next turns to the Christian's spiritual life from which section our reading is taken. In our reading Paul is teaching about the life in the Spirit and so far he has pointed out that those who live 'by their natural inclinations' have their minds and bodies set 'on the things human nature desires,' whereas our minds should be set on spiritual things because, and here our reading begins, 'people who are interested only in unspiritual things can never be pleasing to God.' Our interests are in the spiritual because God has made his home in us. Then Paul states quite clearly 'unless you possessed the Spirit of Christ you would not belong to him.' Even though our bodies may be dead because of the sin we have committed, 'if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you' then this same Spirit living within us will give life to our mortal bodies. Paul concludes, 'So then...' there is no necessity to obey our unspiritual selves because if we do we are doomed to death but in the Spirit we have life. In the Spirit we are sons and daughters of God and this life in the Spirit is not one of slavery, rather it makes us cry out to God as our Father, 'Abba, Father!' In the Spirit we are children of God and coheirs with Christ sharing in Christ's suffering, yes, so as to share his glory. The glory of course which Christ took up when he left this earth and returned to the Father's side and by sharing in Christ's sufferings here in this life we hope one day to share in his eternal glory.