

THE SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST - A

Once called Whit Sunday, on this day the Church celebrates, fifty days after the Resurrection, the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church, the gift promised by Jesus to his apostles. The gospel reading tells of Jesus coming to the disciples for the first time after his death 'in the evening of the first day of the week.' He gives them his peace now all suffering is over, commissions them to go out and preach and sends the Holy Spirit down upon them. 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 Corinthians teaches us that through our baptism we are all one in the Spirit.

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.

The reading, 2.1-11, 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, 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 103.1,24,29-31,34, sings of the glories of creation. The greatness of God is proclaimed in God's countless works, all made so wisely. All creatures depend on God's sustaining power, without it they panic, die, and return to dust, but God always sends out his breath of life, the Spirit, and renews all life on the face of the earth. We pray that God may find glory in his creative work and that in our thoughts we may find joy in the Lord. To appreciate these snippets we need to read the whole of this wonderful psalm.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul evangelised the church at Corinth between A.D. 50 and 52. His policy was to establish the Christian faith in a centre of population, and here he chose the great and populous port of Corinth, so that the faith could spread to the whole of the province of Achaia. The Christian community grew strong composed mainly of poor people, but Corinth was a centre of Greek life, philosophy and religions. It was also a notorious centre of immorality which was to cause problems for the newly converted. In 1 Corinthians Paul addresses urgent problems that faced the church there and the decisions that had to be made to address these problems such as moral conduct, marriage and virginity, liturgical and Eucharistic meetings, charisms, matters concerning the Church and the world, appeals to civil courts, eating foods sacrificed to idols. Paul's religious genius enabled him to use all these problems as a vehicle to expound the profound doctrines of Christian liberty, the sanctification of the body, the supremacy of love, union with Christ. Paul teaches the Corinthians that there is only one master, Christ, and only one message, the cross which is the one true wisdom.

The reading, 12.3-7,12-13, is from the section of the letter where Paul is speaking about the gifts of the Spirit granted to the community as a visible evidence of the presence of the Spirit and to help the young Corinthian community whose faith had not transformed a mentality shot through with paganism. The Corinthians must not be tempted to value and develop the more spectacular gifts and to exercise them in the Christian assembly reminiscent of certain pagan ceremonies. (Read verses 1-3 of the chapter.) The gifts are different but they all come from the same Spirit and should be used in serving the same Lord. The Spirit gives these gifts to each person 'for a good purpose.' The reading then moves on to compare the human body with its many parts and 'though many make one body, so it is with Christ.' We are all united in the Spirit through our baptism 'and the one Spirit was given to us all to drink.' For us on this feast of the coming of the Holy Spirit we must believe this same Spirit is working in the Church through each of us and in our cosmopolitan society we are all one in the Spirit too.

