

THE SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST - B

Sometimes 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. 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 Galatians tells us of the fruits which will be evident in our lives if we are guided by 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 letter to the Galatians. Galatia was part of central Turkey and Paul preached in the southern tip of Galatia on his first missionary journey and he passed through northern Galatia on his second and third missionary journeys. It is uncertain where the letter was written, Ephesus or Macedonia, and when, possibly about the year 57. In the letter, after his introduction, Paul gives an account of his conversion and his meeting in Jerusalem with the elders of the Church which brings out the main point of this letter. After preaching the Risen Christ to the Galatians and bringing them into the Church some Judaisers, that is, those who held that the Old Law and its practises should not be abandoned, unsettled the Galatians in their new found faith. Paul says to the Galatians that they are stupid people and someone has put a spell on them. Abraham put his faith in God which made him righteous in the sight of God, yet he lived many years before the Law given to Moses. It is not keeping the Law which brings righteousness but faith and for the Galatians it is their faith in Jesus Christ. The Israelites were slaves under the Law but Christ by his death has released them from slavery and enabled them to become adopted sons of God. Paul concludes his letter with an exhortation on Christian liberty and love, kindness and perseverance.

Our reading, 5.16-25, is from Paul's exhortation on liberty and love. He teaches the Galatians that the new life of faith is fulfilled in love, indeed love is its only 'Law' and their freedom in Christ is not to be an opportunity for self-indulgence, instead, and here the reading begins, they must be guided by the Spirit. Self-indulgence is always opposed to the workings of the Spirit, 'led by the Spirit, no law can touch you.' Paul then lists the obvious results of self-indulgence and those who give way to self-indulgence 'will not inherit the kingdom of God.' But if we live by the Spirit the results are very different and Paul lists the fruits of the Spirit against which there is no law. To belong to Christ we must 'crucify all self-indulgent passions' and allow ourselves to be 'directed by the Spirit.' A worthy reading for Pentecost Sunday. (Read verses 13,14,&15 they lead into the reading.)

