

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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PENTECOST SUNDAY

5th June 2022

John 20:19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." **20** After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. **21** Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." **22** When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

We turn to John for the reading today. The fourth evangelist rolls the events of Holy Week and Pentecost into one ongoing act of loving re-creation on the part of God. We are invited to see in Jesus, exalted on the cross, the total self-giving of God and we are also asked to receive from Jesus risen his Easter gift of *Shalom*, peace. This is bestowed on us when Jesus the Eternal Word, breathes on us and makes us a new creation, just as God breathed a breath of life into the first human in Genesis 2:7. At the heart of the transformation wrought by the Spirit is the gift of forgiveness which is for everyone, even though some may choose to reject it. This is the meaning of the phrase: 'Whose sins you shall retain they are retained'.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The four marks of our Christian belonging are our personal journey, our community belonging, our practical discipleship and our adult integration of faith and life. None of us "inhabits" all four dimensions fully, all of the time, and yet all four dimensions should in principle be there. The good news of Pentecost is that the Spirit, poured into our hearts, enables all four aspects of our faith to live: the Spirit helps us in our prayer; the body of Christ is animated by the gifts of the Spirit; our service of others gets its energy from the Spirit and the Spirit "reminds us" of all that Jesus taught. Today, we celebrate discipleship in the community of faith.

COMMENTARY

Verse 19 It does not say immediately "the twelve," which would emphasise authority, but rather "the disciples" which underscores attachment to Jesus. As often in John, we are meant to think of the historical disciples of Jesus of Nazareth as well as the present readers, who are disciples of the Risen Lord.

Verse 21 The first sentence sends them out and the second sentence makes the mission possible.

Verse 23 Of course, this gift of the Spirit is given to all and has nothing to do with a special gift to the apostles and even less to do with ordination.

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA - www.tarsus.ie

Today's gospel reminds us that dark situations can be transformed. During the pandemic we witnessed many acts of kindness and generosity. These rays of light help us to remember that the Spirit is constantly at work in this world, transforming situations, moving us to act in spaces that seem hopeless.

"Historically, pandemics have forced people to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world." (Arundhati Roy)

Pentecost transformed the disciples. Can you remember any experience in your own life that transformed you in some way? How have you emerged from the 'portal' of the pandemic? What signs of renewal have you seen in your world?

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT – Go Deeper

The coming of the Holy Spirit is an event in our lives as it was for Jesus' disciples. It is the moment when we realize that following Jesus is not a matter of keeping commandments but of having him live within us. The experience is always the culmination of a journey – we first have to look wonderingly at an empty tomb; to see the risen Jesus and then to have him vanish from our sight; to wait a long time in Jerusalem, trusting that the Lord's promise will be fulfilled.

TEXTUAL COMMENTS

The words "Peace be with you" give us an important message. In a true sense, the disciples do not need to have any further sending of the Holy Spirit. They can feel his presence among them. They can now relate in peace, with themselves, with one another and with their God.

In the second part of the story Jesus tells his disciples the wonderful news that they were sent by the Father. This is really the deep meaning of the sending of the Holy Spirit. All disciples must feel within their hearts the wonderful message that they too have been sent as Jesus was sent. Jesus in his turn has sent his followers into the world. They must be for others what he had been for them.

The third event which symbolized the coming of the Holy Spirit is the deepest of all. The story is in two phases.

- Jesus breathes on the apostles. He had experienced a reality within himself that he wanted to communicate to the disciples. He wanted to teach them that they too can feel within themselves the power of being loved by God, a power that had always been his. He wanted them to experience this, to feel it within themselves. Being loved by God, they must be able to share it with one another. They must feel so close to God that no matter what suffering they might undergo, they would always bring greater glory to God and to one another.

- Jesus' word now explains his gesture. The disciples must receive the Holy Spirit so that, like Jesus, they may have the inner feeling that they are moved by a deep force from within themselves. They too must be able to lift up the rest of the world by giving themselves. Finally, by the sending of the Holy Spirit, the disciples are given the power to forgive one another's sins or to retain them. This is truly a powerful saying. It tells us very powerfully how we are to relate to one another. We can forgive one another's sins, but we can also do the opposite and retain them. It tells us what we are called to in this world. This is a wonderful gift and we thank God for it.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels

John has taken great care over the scene in which Jesus will entrust his mission to his disciples. He wants to make what is essential very clear. Jesus is in the middle of the community, filling them with his peace and his joy. But a mission awaits the disciples. Jesus has not brought them together only to enjoy his presence, but in order for them to make him present in the world.

Jesus 'sends' them. He doesn't tell them concretely to whom they have to go, what they have to do, and how they have to act. *'As the Father sent me, so I send you/'* Their task is the same as that of Jesus. They have no other task than what Jesus received from the Father. They have to be in the world what Jesus has been in it.

They have seen to whom he has reached out, how he has treated the helpless, how he has carried on his project of humanising life, how he has sown seeds of liberation and forgiveness. The wounds in his hands and his side remind them of his total commitment. Jesus now sends them to reproduce his presence among the nations.

But he knows the weakness of his disciples. So he prepares to do something special for them. *"He breathed on them and said: Receive the Holy Spirit."* The action of Jesus has a power that we do not always appreciate. In the Biblical tradition God formed Adam with clay and then breathed a life-giving breath into him - a little clay into which the Spirit of God has been breathed. That will always be what the church is: clay breathed into by the Spirit of God.

Only the Spirit of Jesus makes us a living church.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA - Following in the Footsteps of Jesus

Pointers for Prayer

1. Jesus comes into a room full of fear. Sometimes it is fear itself that makes us close the door on others and on God. Occasionally a person comes along with the gift of breaking through our closed doors, a person who comes to be with us in our fears. Do you have memories of people getting through to you and being with you despite your closed doors? Who brought you peace in a time of anxiety?
2. Jesus showed his wounds to his friends. Moments of grace can occur when another shows us their vulnerable side, or when we do that with them. Let your memories speak of such experiences to you.
3. As Jesus was sent by the Father, so he sent out the disciples. This evokes images of receiving and handing on the things that give life: values, meaning, sense of purpose, love. Who are the people who gave you life by what they handed on to you? To whom have you handed on what is life-giving?
4. In our tradition the final verse reminds us of the Sacrament of Reconciliation but its meaning is broader than that. Spirit-filled people are people who forgive. You might like to recall memories of when you have forgiven, or retained, another's sins. What difference has it made to you and others when you forgave rather than hold sins against others?

JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom