

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, May 13th 2013

We have liturgically celebrated the Lord's Ascension and the Church sees itself in the midst of a Novena of prayer with the disciples in the Upper Room as described in Luke's Acts of the Apostles, waiting for the Advocate, the Spirit that Jesus promised to send to be with them. Along with Mary, the disciples and all the followers of Jesus through the centuries we too await a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Pope Francis has suggested that some of us are frightened by such a prospect because we can't control the Spirit – rather the Spirit may take us where we are afraid to go, both personally and communally.

Today's Gospel tells us that that presence of the Spirit is always with us as love that makes us unafraid to live in freedom. When human friends or family are not around, when they abandon us and the challenge of the message of God, God's Spirit will remain with us. To remain is to attend, to make a dwelling with us, we need not fear because God's Spirit dwells in the "tent" of our body, even as we do. We share that "space" of living.

According to the first reading, the Spirit is the gift of Baptism into Christ which was not just a baptism of repentance for and remission of sin, but a Baptism into a new life of the Spirit of God that fills us with wisdom, eloquence and courage. The Gospel invites us to realize that with God with us we need not fear to go where the Spirit leads us. Paul could preach effectively because he lived and acted according to the guidance of God's Spirit.

In these days Church leaders speak of a "New Evangelization," – not a new message, of course, but a proclamation of the Good news of God's loving mercy to those who have already heard of Christianity in the secular West, but don't believe it, having seen little evidence of the Spirit of God that would make it believable. So what has to be "new" or renewed in this evangelization cannot merely be the media of the proclamation: tweeting, texting, social media, and entertaining websites, rather it is the human-to-human witness of the power of the Spirit to transform our lives and behavior just as the Spirit transformed Paul from a persecutor to a proclaimer of the Good News. What must have made Paul convincing was his compassionate concern for these followers of John the Baptist. We get so little "back story," to this event, so we wonder: what made them listen to him? What made them TRUST them? It was the Spirit of God in him of course – but how did they recognize it? The same way that the Spirit operated in Jesus – it comes forth as loving care that is irresistible, in authentic practice of whatever we preach. If we want people to hear our new evangelization message, we have to be renewed in the Spirit.

Which brings us back to these liturgical days in May when we are challenged to pray for the Spirit; to beg God to send the Fire of God's own Desire into our hearts – to stir up the gifts of Baptism and Confirmation, to fill us with the wisdom to speak the truth lovingly – because it cannot be heard and trusted any other way. Each year we have this period of prayer at the end of the Easter season, but it is seldom referred to in preaching or teaching. May is filled with commencement ceremonies at all levels (what better time to pray for the Spirit of God's to fill the hearts of graduates), of First Communions (when the Spirit of Jesus enters young lives to fill them with nourishment), weddings (when newly joined lovers are entering a life of witness of the meaning of love), and celebrations of anniversaries of all of these milestones in our lives. What better times for us to be focusing on our need for RENEWAL the Spirit brings to us and our world.

Come, O Spirit of Love – you who are speaker of truth, who comforts the afflicted, brings light to blindness, courage in our fear, and liberation from our various imprisonments COME to US. Fill our lives with the wisdom, with faith in God's plan for our world, with hope in the face of despair, with love when we are confronted with violence and apathy, Come, O Spirit of Love, come to me that I might witness to the Truth of You. Amen.

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