

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jun 8th 2014

“Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2).

The Feast of Pentecost is the culmination of the Paschal Mystery! Jesus’ death and resurrection is brought to fulfillment by the sending of the Holy Spirit. And the sending of the Spirit initiates a new age in the history of the world — the Age of the Spirit.

For many years my understanding of the redemption was quite limited. I saw Jesus’ death on the cross as an historical event happening two thousand years ago that atoned for the sin of Adam and Eve and consequently opened the gates of heaven for us. I had no appreciation of the significance of the sending of the Holy Spirit. Today’s readings spell out the significance of the sending of the Spirit for the early church -- and for us today!

The Gospel of John tells us that after Jesus' death the disciples were so afraid of the Jews that they hid themselves in a locked room. But despite the locked doors Jesus appeared to them; he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit transformed them. They began preaching fearlessly.

The Acts of the Apostles describes a further miracle accompanying this preaching. Jews "from every nation under heaven" had come to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, but through the power of the Spirit all understood the disciples “speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.” The Spirit transformed the preachers and the hearers!

And Corinthians reminds us that these gifts of the Spirit were not limited to the original disciples and their hearers but were given to everyone, Jews and Greeks and slaves and free persons. Further these gifts of the Spirit become the source of God’s power animating every part of the community, transforming the community into body of Christ, for as Paul exclaims “we were all given to drink of one Spirit.” Through the Spirit’s presence we are, in Paul’s words, a “new creation” and “temples of the Spirit.”

No hymn to the Holy Spirit is better loved than today’s Sequence by Thomas Aquinas Veni, Sancte Spiritus:

You, of comforters the best;

You, the soul's most welcome guest;

Sweet refreshment here below;

In our labor, rest most sweet;

Grateful coolness in the heat;

Solace in the the midst of woe.

We are blessed to live in the Age of the Spirit. The celebration of Pentecost invites us to recognize and thank the Father for our “soul's most welcome guest” — the Holy Spirit!

Dick Hauser, S.J.