

HOMILY FOR THE PENTECOST SUNDAY OF EASTER
Sunday, 19 May 2024

Fr. Jim Fredericks

Part One: the readings for the day
Part Two: reflection on the readings
Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY
Lectionary: 63

Reading I Acts 2:1-11

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled,
they were all in one place together.
And suddenly there came from the sky
a noise like a strong driving wind,
and it filled the entire house in which they were.
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
and began to speak in different tongues,
as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

Now there were devout Jews
from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem.
At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd,
but they were confused because each one heard them
speaking in his own language.
They were astounded, and in amazement they asked,
"Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans?
Then how does each of us hear them
in his native language?
We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites,
inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia,
Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,
Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene,
as well as travelers from Rome,
both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs,
yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues
of the mighty acts of God."

Responsorial Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34

R. (cf. 30) Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face
of the earth.

Bless the LORD, O my soul!
O LORD, my God, you are great indeed!
How manifold are your works, O LORD!
the earth is full of your creatures.

R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.
May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD be glad in his works!
Pleasing to him be my theme;
I will be glad in the LORD.

R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.
If you take away their breath, they perish
and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth.

R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

Reading II 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13

Brothers and sisters:
No one can say, "Jesus is Lord,"
except by the Holy Spirit.

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts
but the same Spirit;
there are different forms of service but the same Lord;
there are different workings but the same God
who produces all of them in everyone.
To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit
is given for some benefit.

As a body is one though it has many parts,
and all the parts of the body, though many,
are one body, so also Christ.
For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,
whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons,
and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Sequence
Veni, Sancte Spiritus

Come, Holy Spirit, come!
And from your celestial home
 Shed a ray of light divine!
Come, Father of the poor!
Come, source of all our store!
 Come, within our bosoms shine.
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 midst of woe.
O most blessed Light divine,
Shine within these hearts of yours,
 And our inmost being fill!
Where you are not, we have naught,
Nothing good in deed or thought,
 Nothing free from taint of ill.
Heal our wounds, our strength renew;
On our dryness pour your dew;
 Wash the stains of guilt away:
Bend the stubborn heart and will;
Melt the frozen, warm the chill;
 Guide the steps that go astray.
On the faithful, who adore
And confess you, evermore
 In your sevenfold gift descend;
Give them virtue's sure reward;
Give them your salvation, Lord;
 Give them joys that never end. Amen.

Alleluia

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Jn 20:19-23

On the evening of that first day of the week,
when the doors were locked, where the disciples were,
for fear of the Jews,
Jesus came and stood in their midst
and said to them, "Peace be with you."
When he had said this,

he showed them his hands and his side.
The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
And when he had said this,
he breathed on them and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit.
Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,
and whose sins you retain are retained."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Today is Pentecost Sunday. We celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit over the Church and over the whole world. Pentecost is the completion of Easter - the Resurrection of the Christ is fully revealed only in his Ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit to us all.

On this Pentecost Sunday, I ask your prayers for a boy who is facing a difficult task. Miguel (not his real name) has to learn how to speak English.

Miguel came here as a refugee a few months ago from a country that is violent and dangerous, corrupt and, most of all, falling apart. Coming here was not his own decision. In fact, he longs for his chums back in his village. But life on the streets of Miguel's hometown is grim... and Miguel understands this.

Miguel is fifteen years old and depressed. I am not qualified to make such a diagnosis, but I think it is a safe bet. He doesn't speak much, either to his parents or to people at school or to me. Miguel is hunkered down and closed in on himself. He's just trying to survive.

And now, Miguel has a difficult task. He has to learn to speak English. He has to do this for himself and for his family. He has to do it for us as well. And Miguelito is afraid even to try.

With this boy in mind, I wish to remind you that Pentecost is about learning how to speak.

Remember the story: After the crucifixion, the disciples discovered the empty tomb and are filled with fear and confusion. Then the Risen One begins to appear to them over a course of fifty days. ("Pentecost" is Greek for "fiftieth.") After the Ascension, the Father and the Son send down the Holy Spirit over the face of the earth.

In Jerusalem, tongues of fire come to rest on each of the disciples.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit
and began to speak in different tongues,
as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

For me, the most affecting part of this story is the report that there were "devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem." And they all heard the disciples proclaim the Good News in their own language.

It is as if the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is undoing the ancient curse of Babel, when human beings began to stare blankly at one another in incomprehension speaking a cacophony of different languages.

Pentecost is about learning how to speak. Pentecost is about discovering *how to speak*. The Spirit of the Risen Christ has become a tongue of fire within our mouths. And now, the grace of God is overcoming our mutual incomprehension, our isolation from one another and, above all else, our fear to speak to one another.

The Spirit of the Risen One is gathering us into a Church. This means that we have a great responsibility: We are called by God to share the Holy Spirit with those who are struggling to learn how to speak.

And so, once again, I ask your prayers for Miguel. He has to learn English so he can complete his schooling and make friends and succeed. And Miguel is just a little boy deathly afraid to learn this difficult and foreign tongue. I say with great emotion. I can't imagine facing what Miguelito is facing.

It's Pentecost Sunday. Our tongues have been set on fire with the Good News. The Mystery of the Resurrection is being fully revealed to us. In fact, it is being brought to completion within us. Let us not be afraid to share the Spirit with those who must learn how to speak.

PART THREE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR *LECTIO DIVINA*

I suggest that you use the readings and my reflections as an opportunity for practicing *lectio divina* ("divine reading"). This is an ancient spiritual practice that started with the great monks in the Syrian and Egyptian desert back in the early days of the Church. It is really quite simple.

Step one: calm your mind (my Buddhist friends describe the mind as "a mango-tree full of chattering monkeys"). I find that paying attention to your breath for a few minutes is a practical and effective way to do this.

Step two: read the readings slowly and attentively. Savor the words as if you were tasting a great Pinot Noir. Don't rush. You are not looking for information or instructions. You are making friends with a sacred text which will bless you abundantly if you will only open your heart to it and let it speak to you. In *lectio divina*, we are not actually "reading" the Bible. Rather, we are "listening" to the Bible as the sacred words speak to us.

Step three: repeat step two.

Step four: read the homily on the readings.

Step five: Ask yourself a few questions:

- What particular words in the readings call out to me most forcefully?
- What is going on in my life such that these words call to me so forthrightly?
- How am I being asked to change, both interiorly and exteriorly?
- In light of this *lectio divina*, how am I being invited to be of service to the world today?