

Pentecost C

First Reading Acts 2:1-11

When Pentecost day came round, the apostles had all met in one room, when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech. Now there were devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, and at this sound they all assembled, each one bewildered to hear these men speaking his own language. They were amazed and astonished. “Surely”, they said, “all these men speaking are Galileans? How does it happen that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya round Cyrene; as well as visitors from Rome – Jews and proselytes alike – Cretans and Arabs; we hear them preaching in our language about the marvels of God”.

Second reading 1 Corinthians 12:3-7.12-13

No one can say, “Jesus is Lord” unless he is under the influence of the holy Spirit. There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose. Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ. In the one Spirit we were all baptized, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens, and one Spirit was given to us all to drink.

Gospel John 20:19-23

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, “Peace be with you”, and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again. “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you”. After saying this he breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained”.

Meditation

“Do not be surprised that I tell you, you must all be begotten from above..., but you do not know where it (the wind) comes from or where it goes” (John 3:7-8). Although Luke places the sending forth of the Spirit on Pentecost, fifty days after the Resurrection, John places it on Easter night. Each one, then, has his own way of portraying the glorification of Jesus. For John, this glorification took place when he was raised up on the cross. For both, the Spirit is the fruit of the victory Christ won by his death and resurrection. Pentecost cannot be separated from Easter.

But why must the disciples receive the Spirit? From Luke’s perspective, they must receive the Spirit to be able to speak to all in their proper language and thus inaugurate the universal mission of the Church. John does not say anything different, but he says it in a different way.

The apostles are in the upper room with all the door locked for fear of the Jews. They are afraid and their fear is contagious. They are attentive to every sound outside. They fear arrest. Suddenly, Jesus is there in their midst: “Peace be with you!” Peace is what they lack most in this atmosphere of anxiety. Jesus still carries the marks of his passion. He is there, alive and stronger than death.

The doors which were once locked no longer hinder his mission. The hour is no longer one of self-centred fear. Now is the time to allow the Spirit to shatter all barriers and lead the Church where God wills.