

REFLECTION FOR PENTECOST SUNDAY

On this Pentecost Sunday, the Church remembers the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, giving them the strength to open the doors and windows of the Upper Room, where they were locked in fear of the Jews, and to go out into the streets to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, continuing the work of salvation begun by Jesus.

Jesus had spoken to them several times in the Gospel about the Holy Spirit, as the One who would come after him to enlighten his disciples and teach them all the truth. The Church lives by the Holy Spirit. Already in the second century, Athenagoras of Athens affirmed:

"Without the Holy Spirit, God is distant, Christ remains in the past, the Gospel is a dead letter, the Church is a mere organization, authority is power, mission is propaganda, worship is archaism, and moral action is the action of slaves. But in the Holy Spirit, the cosmos is ennobled by the generation of the Kingdom, the risen Christ is made present, the Gospel becomes the power of the Kingdom, the Church realizes Trinitarian communion, authority is transformed into service, the liturgy is memorial and anticipation, human action becomes divine."

These words sum up well what the Holy Spirit is in the Church. However, today's readings help us to understand the reality of the Holy Spirit and his action in each of us.

In the first reading, St. Luke speaks of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles in the image of the scene of God's manifestation on Sinai at the time of the Covenant with the People of God. At Sinai, God manifested himself to the people through signs of fire, an earthquake, and gusts of wind. At Pentecost in Jerusalem, we also see these signs.

At Pentecost, the time of the Church begins; the time of the New Covenant, sealed with the blood of Christ on the cross. The Apostles are the seeds of this new People of God whom the Lord sends as witnesses of the new covenant, animated by the power of his Spirit to preach to all nations the Good News of the Kingdom of God and faith in Jesus Christ who died and rose for us. It is Good News for all peoples, spoken in the languages of all nations. It is the Good News of God's love for us and the language of love is always understood by everyone.

And, as St. Paul tells us in the second reading, taken from the first Letter to the Corinthians, when we live animated by the Holy Spirit, fraternal communion takes place. After all,

"there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the Spirit is the same. In each one, the gifts of the Spirit are manifested for the common good. In fact, all of us—Jews and Greeks, slaves and free men—have been baptized in one Spirit to form one Body."

We are called to live in communion with one another, because after all, God is one, there is one Spirit, there is one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Why then are there divisions, wars, violence, walls that separate us? To live animated by the Holy Spirit means to live in God's love and to witness that love in our lives, opening the doors of our hearts to everyone, because we are all children of the same God, brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. With the power of the Holy Spirit, this fraternity is possible.

This is also what today's Gospel tells us, taken from the Gospel of St. John. There the evangelist tells us that the Lord, in yet another appearance to the twelve, sends the Holy Spirit upon them, so that they may bring forgiveness to the world in his name. Now it is the Apostles who are called to continue the "salvific work" of Jesus. The Church thus becomes, as St. Paul will say, the Body of Christ, the presence of Christ on earth.

The Church is the community of the New Covenant, open to all peoples, receiving from Jesus the power to continue his mission. The Holy Spirit enlightens her, guides her, and gives her strength and courage to carry out this mission. And each one of us as members of this Church must feel sent to witness God's love in the world, as Christ asked us to do. Let us not be afraid then, as Christ is with us through the Holy Spirit who is our strength and light.