

PENTECOST SUNDAY

Gospel: John 15:26-27, 16:12-15

Jesus said to his disciples:

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

REFLECTION 1:

THE ADVOCATE

There is a story told about a well known lawyer. He was known for his immense skill and commanding voice. In a complicated case before a judge, whom the lawyer regarded as slow and rather dim, the judge confessed that he was not clear about the issues involved. The lawyer, coming to his defence, gave a clear account of all the issues and their implications. The judge thanked him courteously but added, ‘I’m sorry Sir, but I regret I am none the wiser’. The lawyer rose wearily to his feet again, ‘Possibly, my lord,’ he said, ‘but you are better informed!’

Information doesn’t add up to wisdom and knowledge doesn’t necessarily lead to sound judgement. Like the judge in our story, we can possess all the information available but still be no wiser about what it actually means. In today’s Gospel we hear Jesus give his final address to his disciples, he promises to send them a good lawyer! Lawyers are only needed when there is trouble and indeed there was plenty of trouble around. Soon there would be arrests, court scenes, trials accusations, and sentences. Jesus promises his disciples that the lawyer he will send will lead them out of confusion and bewilderment into the full truth. This lawyer is no human advocate; he is the Spirit of truth that comes from the Father. Jesus consoles his followers with the promise: ‘I shall have many things to say to you but they would be too much for you now. But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead us to the complete truth.’ (John 15,16)

One of the traits of the Gospel of John is how he presents the story of Jesus as a lawsuit between God and the unbelieving world. Witnesses are lined up on both sides to argue the case; ‘Is Jesus the Messiah and the Son of God?’ God’s witnesses are his Word in Jesus, John the Baptist, the miracles of Jesus and finally the Holy Spirit and the apostles.

This is the group of witnesses who support the claim that Jesus really is the Son of God. The unbelieving Jews, who might bring their own testimony against the claim, represent the opposition. When Jesus’ trial gets underway, the accusers are invited to bear witness regarding the evil Jesus is alleged to have committed. Jesus boldly challenges the officer in court: ‘If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly why do you strike me?’ No one takes up the challenge. Jesus wins the most important lawsuit in history. Pilate declares Jesus innocent three times, so he is guilty of perverted justice when he hands Jesus over to be crucified.

When Jesus dies, however, the lawsuit is not finished. His claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God is confirmed by his resurrection, when the Father raises the innocent one to glory. But there are still many who do not accept the evidence. The principal advocate for Jesus’ claim is now the Holy Spirit. He is the great lawyer who advances the claims of Jesus before the court of an unbelieving world. And

the advocate's principal witnesses are the apostles – those who have been with Jesus from the beginning.

What we celebrate at Pentecost is the coming of this Advocate, the one who enables the apostles to witness to Jesus' claims in the world. Before this the apostles were incapable of acting as witnesses, they were frightened, too confused and hurt to act as effective witnesses on behalf of Jesus. With the help of the Spirit, they are graced with a new courage. The courtroom is the market place of the world and they are willing to testify to the truth of Jesus Christ to anyone who has ears.

As we know from experience the lawsuit still continues – the case is not closed. There will always be opposition to face, and a jury to persuade. The Spirit continues to be the Advocate, calling on generations of Christians to come forward as witnesses in the case.

We are those witnesses; to us is given to continue the case on behalf of Jesus. The disbelieving world still looks to Jesus' witnesses to make their case not so much by the quality of our information, but by the quality and courage of our lives. The world is not dying for lack of information, but may well be dying by not having life in Jesus' name. The evangelist John finishes the case on behalf of Jesus when he tells his readers that he has advanced his cause.

'So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing this you may have life in his name.' And so the case continues.

REFLECTION 2: BANISHING FEAR

The first coming of the Holy Spirit on the Church was wind and fire and the telling of God's wonderful deeds in many tongues. The Spirit also comes as many gifts for the common good, bringing peace along with God's forgiving power. That Spirit of Jesus inspired the Apostles, transforming them from fearful, frightened men into courageous preachers of the Gospel. Today we may very well ask the question: 'what is the relevance of the Holy Spirit for our time?' There are many answers to that question, what is the one thing that prevents us from living fully contented and happy lives? We may cite drugs, crime and violence in the home, unemployment and others. And important and significant as these issues are for us, there is behind them all, that widespread and debilitating emotion that we call fear. In the Upper Room in Jerusalem over 2,000 years ago there was a lot of fear around and the Apostles, we are told, were frightened men.

Fear is the great plague of our age and most of us suffer from it in one form or another. Fear affects the development of children, it torments the teenager who is bullied, it can ravage those in middle years and it can haunt the elderly. We are afraid to love someone for fear that person may not acknowledge our mood. We are afraid to make friends for fear our friendship may not be reciprocated. We are afraid of losing our jobs, unable to meet those repayments, our security, our health. We are afraid for the world and the terrible things that might happen through natural disasters and man-made wars. Some are afraid of God lest he punish us, while most of us are afraid of death and the possibility of our dying sooner than later. Words like anxiety, worry, stress, tension are very much part of the social vocabulary of our day.

However, just as the Spirit of Jesus gave new hope and courage to the frightened disciples in the Upper Room so long ago, so that same Spirit today can release us from the prison world of hopelessness and fear and release once more the gift of God's Spirit in our lives - joy, peace, courage and kindness, to heal us and deliver us from the crippling effects of fear. Our prayer today is that we be aware of God's activity in our lives and those who are 'full of fear' for whatever reason, experience from this day, the healing power of God's Spirit. St. Teresa of Lisieux (The Little Flower) prayed to banish fear; 'to you alone O Jesus. I must cling, running to your arms. There let me hide, safe from all fears, loving you with the tenderness of a child. Amen'.