

## **PENTECOST SUNDAY**

*Gospel: John 14:15-16; 23-26*

Jesus said to his disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever...."

Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you."

### **REFLECTION 1: TRUTHS FROM THE UPPER ROOM**

I read recently that the new Airbus needs a mighty wind for lift off. These airplanes can hold up to 853 passengers and weigh 460 ton. The Airbus needs to be rolling down the runway at 170 miles per hour before the pilot lifts the nose and lets her climb into the sky. Isn't it amazing that all that weight can rise up on the crest of the wind and fly! The engines roar, with their tongues of fire at work. Lifting our church into existence at Pentecost required a similar mighty wind. This heaven-sent power of roaring wind descended upon the disciples, while tongues of fire came down from the skies.

'Peace be with you' is one of Jesus' favourite lines. He says it again and again in scripture. Actually, this phrase is uttered 14 times by the Lord in the Gospels. We say it every Sunday to one another as we shake hands or wave across the aisles. What does it mean? It means that Christ's peace is given to us at baptism through water and the Spirit. This same Spirit is with us throughout each Christian lifetime and abides in his church, in spite of all that would move us towards fear. It is the Spirit of the risen Lord that holds us fast in faith when everything around us feels shaky.

Pentecost Sunday is the conclusion of Easter's fifty days and although we tend to view Pentecost as a single, stand-alone event, it is in fact the pinnacle of Pascal tide. In this time between the bursting open from the tomb and fifty days later, does the full awareness of what it is to live in Christ really mean. Today's scriptures give us a vision of who the Spirit is in the church. The thrust of Pentecost is related to the Blessed Trinity, while the Nativity of the Lord celebrates the incarnation of the Word. Fr Gregory Collins writes of the Holy Spirit as 'the one who works behind the scenes in the drama of redemption'. With the Easter event, there is some wonderful evidence left behind, clues that give us a glimpse of the unimaginable, (not referring to doves and tongues of fire). Rather the Spirit is evidence of faith in action – the faith of the early church and our faith today.

We know that the Spirit is with us today because the church continues to journey together in spite of great human fragility. We know that the Spirit is with us because there are still heroes and heroines among us who choose justice over law and subsequently pay the prophet's price. We know that the Spirit is with us because men and women from many nations and faiths hear the message of peace, forgiveness, compassion and human dignity. Organisations like the World Council of Churches, Youth 2000, Taizé, among others, testify to the indiscriminate action of the Spirit in our midst.

If we are to make a life of loving and forgiving one another, we need the Spirit after the resurrection. The good news is we have the Spirit and this gift is the only one that really keeps on giving.

## REFLECTION 2:

## BECOMING COMMUNITY

Pentecost (50) is called the birthday of the Church. This is because at the moment the Holy Spirit entered the followers of Jesus, they became the body of Christ in the world - a community united to Jesus in our world. However, this birthing of Christ in our midst did not happen without serious birth pangs. Pentecost marks the most important transition the followers of Jesus had to face after he had departed from them at the Ascension. He had gone, but they had been told to remain on in the city and pray until the Spirit, the Advocate comes.

In the 10-day interval between his departure and the arrival of the Spirit, the group entered into an intense time of prayer and soul searching. No doubt many in the group felt deeply unworthy; even ashamed - they had failed Jesus in his hour of greatest need. Even when the disciples were told by the women that Jesus has risen they were sceptical. They were hiding in a room with locked doors, slow to believe.

Luke tells us that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was with the Apostles and about 120 other believers. This is an important detail, because in a sense, Mary had already been through this experience three decades earlier at the Annunciation. There, in the town of Nazareth, the same Holy Spirit had overshadowed her as she pondered the meaning of the angel's words that, with her consent, God's word would be made flesh in her womb. She would give birth to the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.

The same Jesus, now revealed as the crucified and risen Christ, is about to return by the power of the Holy Spirit to his followers. His early sojourn is complete, but they will become his mysterious presence - the body of Christ in the world. They will receive from the Spirit every gift they need to carry out his redemptive work - all the baptised will experience God's in-dwelling - empowering them to extend the message of Jesus to all humanity through their preaching, witness and service.

Pentecost took place as a powerful wind shakes the house and a baptism of fire in the shape of tongues descends on the members of the group. They are one in the Spirit, one in faith, hope and love. As a sign of this unity, they speak to the crowds in any language, recalling for many the healing of the ancient divisions that took place at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11).

What the disciples freely receive, they must now freely give - 'whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven'. The work of the Spirit is mercy. This Feast recalls for us that we are now the Church, the body of Christ in the world, the Spirit providing us with all we need to fulfil the mission of bringing the Gospel to the ends of the Earth.