



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG

FAITH CIRCLES

WEEKLY SMALL
GROUP CATECHESIS

FEAST OF PENTECOST • YEAR A



SUNDAY GOSPEL

Giving of the Holy Spirit

John 7:37-39

On the last day and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood there and cried out: 'If any man is thirsty, let him come to me! Let the man come and drink who believes in me!' As scripture says: From his breast shall flow fountains of living water. He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for there was no Spirit as yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified. ■

GOSPEL REFLECTION

Fr Graham Schmitzer

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me." Jesus is speaking these words in a country where rainfall is often scarce, where water is a necessity of life. The theme of water runs right through the Scriptures. Genesis speaks of the Holy Spirit hovering over the primeval Chaos, bringing light from darkness, and life from "the mass of waters". In the Old Testament, we hear the cry of the people in the desert of Sinai, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt ... to die of thirst?"

Moses struck the rock of Horeb, the mountain of God and water gushed forth. St Paul would later say that the rock was Christ.

St John obviously had this scene in mind when he reveals that, following Jesus' death, a soldier struck Jesus' side with a lance and there flowed forth blood and water. The early Fathers of the Church saw this event as the source of sacramental life in the Church. "Why did you allow this to happen?" St Catherine of Siena is reported to have asked our Lord. "Surely your death proved your love?" Jesus is said to have answered, "My death was a moment in time, my open heart is for all time."

It is St John who tells us that having cried "it is accomplished", Jesus bowed his head and "gave up the spirit". Now, John is the master of innuendo. The Church Fathers commented that when the earthen vessel of his body was shattered in

death, Jesus breathed forth the Holy Spirit upon the world. Jesus' mission was actually beginning (John has no Pentecost scene in his Gospel.)

The Holy Spirit would once more hover over the "chaos" caused by Jesus "death" and the Body of Christ, the Church, would come to life.

Relatively early in his Gospel (Chapter 7 of 21 Chapters), John is recording Jesus prophesying that from the hearts of those who truly believe in him, "Fountains of living water shall flow." Vessels of clay that we are, St Paul would say, we hold a treasure. If we would allow ourselves to "die" with Jesus while we are actually still alive, these vessels that we are, will explode with graces for the world in which we live. ■

A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS

The Feast of Pentecost commemorates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room. Like Easter, this event took place on a pre-existing Jewish feast and ended with a surprise. The Acts of the Apostles describes the signs and fruits of that extraordinary outpouring: the strong wind and tongues of fire; fear disappeared, leaving courage in its place; tongues melted and everyone understood the message. Wherever the Spirit of God reaches, everything is reborn and transfigured. Pentecost is the event that signals the birth of the Church and her public manifestation; and two features strike us: the Church *astounds* and *confuses*.

A fundamental element of Pentecost is *astonishment*. Our God is a God of *astonishment*, this we know. No one expected anything more from the disciples: after Jesus' death they were a small, insignificant group of defeated orphans of their Master. There occurred instead an unexpected event that astounded: the people were astonished because each of them heard the disciples speaking in

their own tongues, telling of the great works of God (cf. Acts 2:6-7, 11).

The Church born at Pentecost is an astounding community because, with the force of her arrival from God, a new message is proclaimed — the Resurrection of Christ — with a new language — the universal one of love. A new proclamation: Christ lives, he is risen; a new language: the language of love. The disciples are adorned with power from above and speak with courage — only minutes before they all were cowardly, but now they speak with courage and candour, with the freedom of the Holy Spirit.

Thus the Church is called into being forever: capable of astounding while proclaiming to all that Jesus Christ has conquered death, that God's arms are always open, that his patience is always there awaiting us in order to heal us, to forgive us. The risen Jesus bestowed his Spirit on the Church for this very mission.

Take note: if the Church is alive, she must always surprise. It is incumbent upon the living Church to astound. A Church which is unable to astound is a Church that is weak, sick, dying, and

that needs admission to the intensive care unit as soon as possible!

Some in Jerusalem would have liked for Jesus' disciples, frozen in fear, to remain locked inside so as not to create *confusion*. Even today, many would like this from the Christians. Instead, the risen Lord pushes them into the world: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21). The Church of the Pentecost is a Church that won't submit to being powerless, too "distilled". No, she doesn't submit to this! She doesn't want to be a decoration. She is a Church that doesn't hesitate to go out, meet the people, proclaim the message that's been entrusted to her, even if that message disturbs or unsettles the conscience, even if that message perhaps brings problems and sometimes leads to martyrdom. She is born one and universal, with a distinct identity, but open, a Church that embraces the world but doesn't seize it; she sets it free, but embraces it like the colonnade in this Square: two arms that open to receive, but that don't close to detain. We Christians are free, and the Church wants us free! ■

TALKING POINTS

1. What are some places of "chaos" within your own life? In what ways do you experience God's Spirit "hovering" over them, bringing life?
2. In what ways have you felt the presence of God's Spirit alive and active in your life?
3. How has God's presence within and around you surprised and astonished you?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for each other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

Reflect: Speak with Jesus about those places in your life where you would like a greater sense of the life, peace and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Response: *Come Holy Spirit.*

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, you love us so much that you gave us your only Son and sent his Spirit to be our comforter and guide. Send us your Spirit now so that we may be filled with living water and live our lives more fully and actively in your presence and grace.



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