

## GOSPEL

JOHN 20:19-23

In the evening of 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.'

## A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

The Time of Easter culminates in today's celebration of Pentecost, centred on the death and Resurrection of Jesus. This Solemnity inspires us to remember and relive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the other disciples gathered in prayer with the Virgin Mary in the Upper Room (cf. Acts 2:1-11). On that day the history of holy Christianity began, because the Holy Spirit is *the source of holiness*, which is not the privilege of the few, but the vocation of all.

Indeed, through Baptism, we are all called to participate in the same divine life of Christ and, with Confirmation, to become his witnesses in the world. "The Holy Spirit bestows holiness in abundance among God's holy and faithful people" (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, n. 6). God "does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness" (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 9).

Through the ancient prophets the Lord had already announced his plan to the people. Ezekiel: "I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You ... shall

be my people and I will be your God" (36:27-28). The prophet Joel: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy... Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit.... All who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered (2:28, 29, 32). And all these prophesies are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, mediator and guarantor of the perennial outpouring of the spirit (cf. *Roman Missal*, Preface after the Ascension). And today is the celebration of the outpouring of the Spirit.

Since that day of Pentecost, and until the end of times, this holiness, the fullness of which is Christ, is bestowed upon all those who are open to the action of the Holy Spirit and strive to be docile to him. It is the Spirit who makes us feel complete joy. The Holy Spirit, by coming to us, overcomes aridity, opens hearts to hope, and spurs and fosters interior maturity in our relationship with God and neighbour. It is what Saint Paul tells us: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23). The Spirit creates all this in us. For this reason today we celebrate this richness which the Father gives us.

Let us ask the Virgin Mary to obtain for the Church even today a renewed Pentecost, a renewed youthfulness that will give us the joy of living and witnessing to the Gospel and "to pour out upon us a fervent longing to be saints for God's greater glory" (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, n. 177).

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Pope Francis tells us that, the Holy Spirit "is bestowed upon all those who are open to the action of the Holy Spirit and strive to be docile to him". What does it mean to you to be "open" to the Holy Spirit?

- What is one way we can invite the Holy Spirit into our lives more?
- There are many gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. What gift or fruit do you need in your life most at the moment

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.