

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.'

HOMILY OF POPE LEO XIV

8 June 2025

"The day has dawned upon us when..., glorified by his ascension into heaven following his resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ sent the Holy Spirit" (Saint Augustine, Sermon 271, 1). Today, too, what took place in the Upper Room takes place anew in our midst. Like a mighty wind that overtakes us, like a crash that startles us, like a fire that illuminates us, the gift of the Holy Spirit descends upon us (cf. Acts 2:1-11).

As we heard in the first reading, the Spirit accomplished something extraordinary in the lives of the Apostles. Following Jesus' death, they had retreated behind closed doors, in fear and sadness. Now they receive a new way of seeing things, an interior understanding that helps them to interpret the events that occurred and to experience intimately the presence of the Risen Lord. The Holy Spirit overcomes their fear, shatters their inner chains, heals their wounds, anoints them with strength and grants them the courage to go out to all and to proclaim God's mighty works.

The reading from the Acts of the Apostles tells us that in Jerusalem at that time there was a multitude of people from various backgrounds, yet "each one heard them speaking in his own native tongue" (v. 6). In a word, at Pentecost, the doors of the Upper Room were opened because the Spirit opens borders. As Benedict XVI explained: "The Holy Spirit

bestows understanding. The Spirit overcomes the 'breach' that began in Babel, the confusion of mind and heart that sets us one against the other. The Spirit opens borders... The Church must always become anew what she already is. She must open the borders between peoples and break down the barriers between class and race. In her, there cannot be those who are neglected or disdained. In the Church there are only free men and women, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ" (Homily for Pentecost, 15 May 2005).

Here we have an eloquent image of Pentecost, one that I would like to pause for a moment and reflect upon with you.

The Spirit opens borders, first of all, in our hearts. He is the Gift that opens our lives to love. His presence breaks down our hardness of heart, our narrowness of mind, our selfishness, the fears that enchain us and the narcissism that makes us think only of ourselves. The Holy Spirit comes to challenge us, to make us confront the possibility that our lives are shrivelling up, trapped in the vortex of individualism. Sadly, oddly enough, in a world of burgeoning "social" media, we risk being ever more alone. Constantly connected, yet incapable of "networking". Always immersed in a crowd, yet confused and solitary travellers.

The Spirit of God allows us to find a new way of approaching and experiencing life. He puts us in touch with our inmost self, beneath all the masks we wear. He leads us to an encounter with the Lord by teaching us to experience the joy that is his gift. He convinces us, as we just heard in Jesus' words, that only by abiding in love, will we receive the strength to remain faithful to his word and to let it transform us. The Spirit opens our interior borders, so that our lives can become places of welcome and refreshment.

The Spirit also opens borders in our relationship with others. Jesus tells us that this Gift is the love between him and the Father that comes to dwell within us. We then become capable of opening our hearts to our brothers and sisters, overcoming our rigidity, moving beyond our fear of those who are different, and mastering the passions that stir within. The Spirit also transforms those deeper, hidden dangers that disturb our relationships, like suspicion, prejudice or the desire to manipulate others.

I think too, with great pain, of those cases where relationships are marked by an unhealthy desire for domination, an attitude that often leads to violence, as is shown, tragically, by numerous recent cases of femicide.

The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, brings to maturity within us the fruits that enable us to cultivate good and healthy relationships: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22). In this way, the Spirit broadens the borders of our relationships and opens us to the joy of fraternity. This is also a critical yardstick for the Church. For we are truly the Church of the Risen Lord and disciples of Pentecost if there are no borders or divisions among us; if we are able to dialogue and accept one another in the Church, and to reconcile our diversities; and if, as Church, we become a welcoming and hospitable place for all.

Finally, the Spirit also opens borders between peoples. At Pentecost, the Apostles spoke the languages of those they met, and the confusion of Babel was finally resolved by the harmony brought about by the Spirit. Whenever God’s “breath” unites our hearts and makes us view others as our brothers and sisters, differences no longer become an occasion for division and conflict but rather a shared patrimony from which we can all draw, and which sets us all on journey together, in fraternity.

The Spirit breaks down barriers and tears down the walls of indifference and hatred because he “teaches us all things” and “reminds us of Jesus’ words” (cf. Jn 14:26). He teaches us, reminds

us, and writes in our hearts before all else the commandment of love that the Lord has made the center and summit of everything. Where there is love, there is no room for prejudice, for “security” zones separating us from our neighbors, for the exclusionary mindset that, tragically, we now see emerging also in political nationalisms.

It was on the feast of Pentecost that Pope Francis observed: “In our world today, there is so much discord, such great division. We are all ‘connected’, yet find ourselves disconnected from one another, anesthetized by indifference and overwhelmed by solitude” (Homily, 28 May 2023). The wars plaguing our world are a tragic sign of this. Let us invoke the Spirit of love and peace, that he may open borders, break down walls, dispel hatred and help us to live as children of our one Father who is in heaven.

Brothers and sisters, Pentecost renews the Church and the world! May the strong wind of the Spirit come upon us and within us, open the borders of our hearts, grant us the grace of encounter with God, enlarge the horizons of our love and sustain our efforts to build a world in which peace reigns.

May Mary Most Holy, Woman of Pentecost, Virgin visited by the Spirit, Mother full of grace, accompany us and intercede for us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/Homily?



Head: Pope Leo XIV tells us that the first work of the Spirit is in our hearts, then in relationships, and then between peoples. What might be the reason for this order?



Heart: The Holy Spirit's "presence breaks down our hardness of heart, our narrowness of mind, our selfishness" and so on. What do you think the Holy Spirit most needs to do in you?



Hands: Focusing on our relationships within our parish, how might we grow as brothers and sisters in the Lord? What could we do?

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. Offer 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 praying the ‘Glory Be’.