

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*28 May 2023*

Today, the Solemnity of Pentecost, the Gospel takes us to the Upper Room, where the apostles had taken refuge after the death of Jesus (Jn 20:19-23). On the evening of Passover, the Risen One presents himself precisely into that situation of fear and anguish and, breathing on them, says: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (v. 22). In this way, with the gift of the Spirit, Jesus wishes to free the disciples from fear, from this fear that keeps them holed up at home, and he frees them so that they may be able to go out and become witnesses and proclaimers of the Gospel. Let us dwell a little on what the Spirit does: he frees from fear.

The disciples had closed the doors, the Gospel says, "for fear" (v. 19). The death of Jesus had shocked them, their dreams had been shattered, their hopes had vanished. And they had closed themselves inside. Not only in that room, but within, in the heart. I would like to underline this: closed inside. How often do we too shut ourselves in? How often, because of some difficult situation, because of some personal or family problem, because of the suffering that marks us or the evil we breathe around us, do we risk slipping slowly into loss of hope and lack the courage to go on? This happens many times. And then, like the apostles, we shut ourselves in, barricading ourselves in the labyrinth of worries.

Brothers and sisters, this "shutting ourselves in" happens when, in the most difficult situations, we allow fear to take the upper hand and let its stern voice prevail within us. When fear enters, we close ourselves off. The cause, therefore, is fear: fear of not being able to cope, of having to face everyday battles alone, of risking and then being disappointed, of making the wrong choices. Brothers, sisters, fear blocks, fear paralyses. And it also isolates: let us think of the fear of others, of foreigners, of those who are different, who think in another way. And there can even be the fear of God: that he will punish me, that he will be angry with me... If we give space to these false fears, the doors close: the doors of the heart, the doors of society, and even the doors of the Church! Where there is fear, there is closure. And this is no good.

However, the Gospel offers us the remedy of the Risen One: the Holy Spirit. He frees us from the prisons of fear. When they receive the Spirit, the apostles — we celebrate this today — come out of the Upper Room and go out into the world to forgive sins and to proclaim the good news. Thanks to him, fears are overcome and doors open. Because this is what the Spirit does: he makes us feel God's closeness, and thus, his love casts out fear, illuminates the way, consoles, sustains in adversity. Faced with fears and closure, then, let us invoke the Holy Spirit for us, for the Church and for the whole world: let a new Pentecost cast out the fears that assail us and revive the flame of God's love.

May Mary Most Holy, the first to be filled with the Holy Spirit, intercede for us.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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



Head: Jesus enters into the disciples' fear, speaks peace, and gives the Holy Spirit; what does this reveal about how God meets us in fear and transforms it?



Heart: The disciples were closed in by fear until the Spirit freed them; where do you notice fear closing you in — in your heart, your relationships, or your faith?



Hands: The Spirit sends the disciples out to forgive and proclaim; where might you need to step out more boldly this week, trusting the Spirit rather than your fears?

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'.