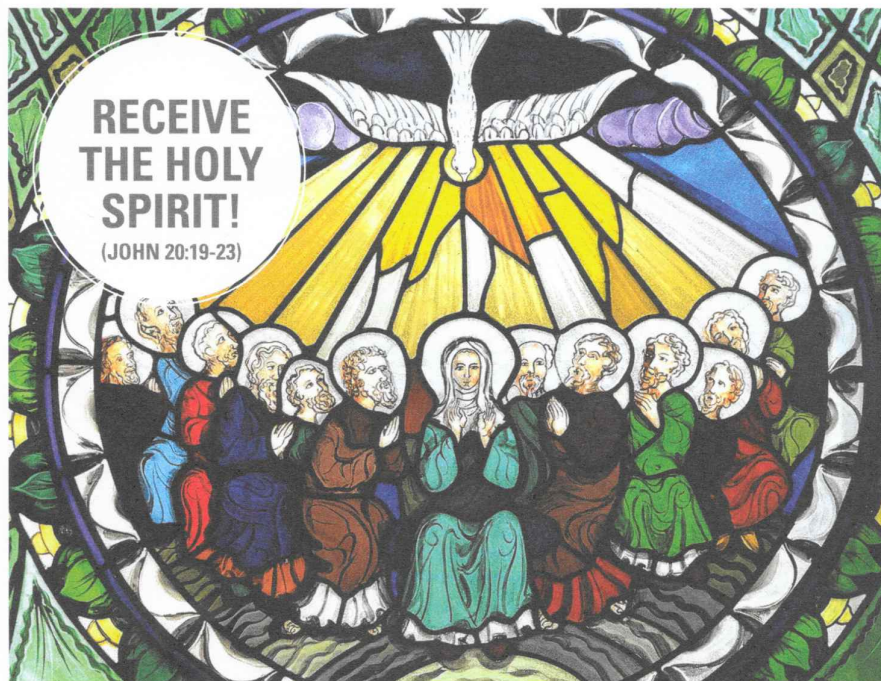


Sunday Message

THE WORD

Year A • Psalter Week 1



We hear today of the appearance of the risen Jesus to his disciples who are locked away in fear of the Jewish authorities. Although they have heard from Mary Magdalene about her experiencing the risen Lord, their faith is not yet complete: it is still tempered by anxiety and apprehension about their future.

Thomas, as we discover later, is not present at this event. Jesus' word to them is "Peace be with you." This is more than a simple greeting: it is the fulfilment of his promise about bestowing on them the gift of a peace the world cannot give and that they will have peace in him. The disciples are filled with joy, a sign that their faith is now complete: they have experienced the risen Jesus for themselves, an essential element in the narratives which establish authentic witnesses to the resurrection, which no one saw occur.

However, this peace and joy is not something to be kept within the circle of present disciples. Up to this point, they have had no share or part in the mission of Jesus. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus does not give them any role in preaching or healing: for example, at the feeding of the crowds, it is Jesus who performs all the action, distributing the bread to those present. Now the disciples become apostles: they are to continue Jesus' presence and mission now that he is no longer with them physically, and for that task he breathes on them the Holy Spirit. ■

LEARN

Pentecost was one of the Jewish pilgrimage feasts celebrated in Jerusalem. It was originally a harvest festival, offering the first-fruits of the barley crop.

In Jewish practice, it became associated with God's self-revealing at Sinai during the Exodus and the giving of the Law.

The bishop's liturgical greeting "Peace be with you" comes from our Gospel extract today.

SAY

Come, Holy Spirit: transform me and the face of the earth.

REFLECT

With the feast of Pentecost, the Easter mystery reaches its fulfilment in Jesus' giving of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. We might remember that the Holy Spirit is at work in guiding the Church, the people of God today. One of the gifts of the Spirit is fortitude, perhaps better rendered as courage. Although we may pray that the leaders of the Church and we ourselves may be open to the promptings of the Spirit, it is not always evident that we are willing to listen when the Spirit seems to be nudging the Church in a direction away from the tried and familiar practices which we are used to.

The biblical Spirit is often portrayed as a power, as energy which drives and strengthens God's agents. It is not something safe or tame, which is why we may be afraid of where the Spirit may be leading us. The answers and practices of yesterday may have suited the questions and situation of the Church then; but the Church is the people of God: it is not the hierarchy; nor is it simply a human institution. It is, rather, a living organism, the body of Christ and its (or rather our) life-principle is the Holy Spirit. On this feast of Pentecost, we think how a small, frightened group of disciples was transformed into a courageous band of apostles who believed that they had a message for anyone who would accept it. We are that group today: we have been given the Holy Spirit. ■

DO

When you turn on a light, notice how the bulb or strip is transformed from something quite mundane into a source of light and heat. If you really allowed the Holy Spirit to influence you, you also could be transformed: would you be prepared to let that happen?

