

31st May 2020 (Pentecost Sunday, Year A)

Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 103(104):1,24,29-31,34; 1 Corinthians 12:3-7,12-13; John 20:19-23.

'Peace be with you.'

Jesus promised the disciples that when he returned to the Father, he would send them *'another paraclete'* to be with them *'until the end of times.'* Today we celebrate the coming of this second paraclete that shares with us the life of the Father.

God will never leave us alone. God created us in his image and likeness and we can only live our calling fully when we have the life of God within us. The Spirit of God we receive in our Baptism and is renewed in us each time we celebrate one of the other sacraments, enlightens us and guides us as we enter into an ever-deeper relationship with God. As Paul reminds us, unless we are stirred by the Holy Spirit, we are not able to pray and declare that Jesus is Lord! It is the Spirit within us that prays and leads us to God.

In beautiful imagery, Paul explains that the same Spirit produces different fruits and gifts within us and within the Body of Christ. The Spirit is like the rain; it is the same water that is equally rained upon the whole garden, yet in the same garden, different trees and plants develop different produce. The garden produces different fruits, vegetables and flowers. The Spirit does not discriminate, but empowers each to produce a hundredfold!

We may at times feel jealous when we meet sisters and brothers who share gifts that we would like to possess. The Body of Christ will only work if it moves ahead as a coordinated body where each member produces what is expected of it. Together as one body, united by the Spirit of God, we produce the fruit that is expected of us.

The first reading from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, and the gospel reading, help us understand the characteristics of the holy Spirit. The first reading informs us that the Spirit comes with a power of what sounds like strong wind and looks like flames of fire. In the gospel Jesus speaks of peace and forgiveness.

Wind and fire are two very strong images from nature. Strong wind and fire do not leave anything unchanged. We are still talking about the devastating effects left by the big fires that devastated large parts of our country. Fire destroys, cleans, releases energy, heats, gives light – causes great changes in the environment. Things are never the same after a fire, something has to give way. Strong winds too can cause great damage, we are always warned to secure garden furniture so as not to risk it flying around. When trees are threatened by wind, they are encouraged to dig their roots deeper, wind clears the air and helps pollinate flowers. Once again, nothing is ever the same after the passage of a strong wind.

Yet, the Spirit is also a Spirit of peace and forgiveness. Peace does not imply lack of conflict, the strong wind and the devastating fire will still happen, but the person of peace will find his rest in God who is Peace. The peace of God comes with forgiveness. God always forgives each one of our sins and wants us to do the same.

How does the Spirit of God work within me? How do I let the Spirit of God guide me? Firstly, I need to be free enough to let the Spirit clean me, purify me, and change me. A sign of the Spirit at work within me is the fruits that I produce. If I look back on my life and realise that I have not changed, then I can be very certain that I have not let the Spirit soak me and change me. Growth and change is one of the fruits of the Spirit. Secondly, am I a person of peace and forgiveness? Am I ready to forgive those who hurt me and offer a hand in peace? How do I act in the face of contradiction and conflict; do I bring the peaceful healing that is of God, or do I continue to incite trouble and cause more severe division?

God lives in each one of us. We are all images of God, imbued by the Spirit, yet we have been endowed by a free will and we have the freedom to refuse God's Spirit. Let us make sure that we live as members of the Body, filled with this Divine Spirit.

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