

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER YEAR A 2020

Reflection

Fr Tao Pham

This weekend we are in the latter part of the Easter season, the attention shifts from the resurrection appearance to the continued presence of the glorified Christ with his Church through the Spirit. This is the connection between the First Reading and the Gospel.

First Reading (Acts 8:5-8.14-17). St. Luke marks each stage of the spread of the Gospel with a 'Pentecost'. The Gospel was preached in Samaria by Philip, one of the seven deacons, with marked success. Our reading describes a Samaritan Pentecost. It tells of the joy and enthusiasm with which the Samaritans received the Gospel. The statement that the Samaritan converts, baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, had not received the Holy Spirit has puzzled many. The explanation lies in the fact that St. Luke required each new stage in the growth of the community to be authenticated by an official representative of the Church. Here Peter and John put their stamp of approval on the work of Philip. It doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit is bestowed only in a "second baptism".

Second Reading (1 Pet. 3:15-18). Peter encourages Christians to remain steadfast under pressure in their attachment to Christ. The Christian way of life is to be defended but this should be done with courtesy and respect. Their good lives will be the best way to counter false accusation. If they suffer for doing good, they should remember that Jesus, though innocent, suffered and died to lead us to God.

Gospel (Jn 14:15-21). This is part of Jesus' farewell discourse. Loving Jesus means listening to his word and putting it into practice. To those who respond in this way he promises the gift of the Spirit. Jesus will not leave his disciples orphaned. By their faith, they will be able to 'see' him and share in his life and in the life of the Father. From this we learn that we cannot claim to be one with Jesus, and to be living according to the Spirit, unless we observe his commands in our life.

Reflection Gospel Reading 14: 15-21.

Those who love Jesus are faithful to his commands. These commands were given not only in words, but also by the example of Jesus found throughout the Gospel. Promising not to leave his disciples orphaned, Jesus tells them that he will send another Advocate who will be with them always. Jesus himself is the Advocate from the Father, and he promises to send the Holy Spirit, another Advocate. This Advocate will be sent by the Son and the Father and will be recognized only by those who live a life of faith, not by those who live for the flesh alone. Through this Advocate, Jesus will return to his disciples.

Now let us reflect on the three promises of Jesus showing His fidelity to the Apostles and to each of us in the Gospel reading (Jn 14:15-21) today.

First, Jesus promises, “I will send you another Advocate”. The Lord is speaking of course, of the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to be the energy and staying power in our life of faith. This Holy Spirit is manifested not primarily in extraordinary gifts but in the ordinary gifts of fidelity, prayer and conscience that enable us to live out our faith day by day. This Spirit also helps us understand what we believe, draws us into the truth of Jesus, is a link to God by being God and yet with us, a Spirit that comforts us in all our afflictions. As our faith comes more and more to life within us, we can call on the Spirit to help us continue to grow.

Second, Jesus promises, “I will not leave you orphans. I will come back to you.” Remember these words of Jesus are at the Last Supper. Jesus is referring to his return to the Apostles at Easter. Jesus’ leaving is for his own good. He is returning to his Father. To return to the Father is to go home. It is to go to honour and glory. This leaving is good for the one leaving and good for those left behind. This is the full truth of what is happening here. Jesus’ leaving is, or will be, good for the Apostles because he will send the Holy Spirit. His departure will not leave them unsupported and unguided as they feared. ‘I will not leave you orphans’, he said. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the disciples will come to know and appreciate the unity of the Son and the Father. They will also understand that they too participate in the communion between the Father and the Son: “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you” (John 14:20).

To us today, this promise of the Lord is kept in the Eucharist when Jesus comes to us in his Risen Presence under the form of bread and wine to be our strength and to give us a pledge of eternal life with him. The Eucharist is Jesus’ fulfillment of that promise to us. Because of the Eucharist, we are not orphans, never alone, no matter what we may face. The second promise is the gift of the Eucharist where Jesus remains with us. Nowhere do we feel so close to him as when we receive him in the Eucharist. When we receive the Eucharist we are in communion with him – a holy communion. Here he nourishes our hearts with his love. The food of the Eucharist gives us the strength to do his word and to live as his disciples.

Third, Jesus promises, “If you keep my commandments, my Father and I will reveal ourselves to you and come to you.” The presence of Christ becomes more vivid to us as we follow the Gospel. Our failure to follow the Gospel is like a spiritual cataract where our faith is obstructed or clouded.

As we cleanse and clarify our life, we start to experience the presence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in a variety of ways. The Lord gives the promise not only to the Apostle but to the Church as a whole. We need to make sure that our life is faithful to Jesus. Again the words of Jesus are, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15) We cannot have both a pure love of Jesus and sin in our lives at the same time. Truly loving Jesus leads us to give up whatever in our lives draws us away from Jesus. Truly loving Jesus leads us to making changes in the way we live and think and act.

Sinning is putting Jesus in second place but when we love Jesus we put Jesus in first place and so we will keep his commandments. Let us never be afraid to turn to Jesus for mercy after sinning, he is always waiting to forgive us and restore us again. Let us resolve during this time to love Jesus by keeping his commandments so that the love of Jesus and the Father and the Spirit may be in our hearts and we may have Jesus in our heart.

The experience of God's presence in us can only be known through the gift of the Advocate who comes from the Father and the Son. The Advocate will inspire us to love God, who loves us deeply and infinitely. With the coming of the Advocate, God will dwell with us. The early Christian community could not remain as an enclosed, self-contained group in Jerusalem. Its members felt impelled by Christ to bring the Good news to Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. Christians in every age are called to be fully involved in the life and joys and pains of the world. At times this can be difficult but the Holy Spirit of God is always with us to help us. Let us try our best to bring the Good News to others. Amen.

Hope to see all of you at our churches soon.

Take care and have a lovely week!

Fr Tao Pham