

THE EMMAUS SERIES

Pentecost Sunday, Year B

Acts 2:1-11

1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13

John 20:19-23

New life in the Spirit of Christ

The reading from Acts sets the tone for today's celebration. Luke tells how the Church's universal mission was inaugurated, in the power of the Holy Spirit, as faithful Jews gathered for their Pentecost festival, fifty days after the Passover celebration.

Luke was conscious of his task of telling the world what had really happened – as he makes clear in introducing each of his two works. He faced a great challenge, however, as he set out to describe and interpret the vast complexity of the Church's early development. He met this difficulty by choosing several events that were turning points in the Church's history, and presenting them in a dramatic way that made clear their profound significance – a device used by other writers of the day.

Luke's story of the Church's first Pentecost is an example of this approach. The Church's first courageous witness, and its subsequent announcing of the Good News throughout the known world, was a remarkable fulfilment of the Saviour's promise that he would give his disciples courage and power through the gift of his own Spirit (Mk 13:9-11). The universality of the Church's mission is made clear. The Church's first witness is to 'devout people from every nation' - in the first place to 'Jews', but with the mention of 'proselytes' among the crowd addressed the conversion of the gentiles is also anticipated. In the continuation of our passage, Peter's sermon gives a summary of the Church's early witness.

It is in the power of the Spirit that the Church takes up its mission. Today, before all days, the Church invites us to deepen our faith in the Saviour's gift of his own Spirit. Already in the Old Testament, 'the Spirit of God' was active as a life-giving force at work in creation. Anointed by the Spirit as God's 'Servant', in fulfilment of the prophecies of the Book of Isaiah, Jesus has led us to know the Spirit as a Person sharing the one divine life with the Father and the Son. Today's gospel reading is a meditation upon this shared life, and the way in which those who find faith in Christ are made to share in it. Those who have received the gift of the Spirit can tell the world the 'complete truth' about the Saviour of the world, and can announce 'the things to come', because the mystery of God's final plan for the world has been revealed in the events which took place in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover.

The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ; the Spirit is the very life principle of the Church; the Spirit dwells in each believer as our 'paraclete' – the companion who stands by us in all our trials, providing whatever is needed to survive every trial. We live 'in Christ' because he has given us his own Spirit. Paul's letter to the Galatians contrasts the ugly manifestations of a selfish abuse of our freedom with the 'fruits of the Spirit' which are to be seen in the lives of those who chose to 'belong to Christ Jesus': 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, truthfulness, gentleness and self-control'. In these things, the Spirit gives us an intimation of 'the things to come', the fullness of God's Kingdom

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