

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD**  
**in**  
**THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY**  
**Solemnity of Pentecost**  
**May 28, 2023**

**SCRIPTURES:**

<b>Acts 2:1-11</b>	<b>The community is filled with the Holy Spirit.</b>
<b>1 Corinthians 12:3-13</b>	<b>The Spirit gives Christ a new Body.</b>
<b>John 20:19-23</b>	<b>Jesus comes to those who fear, bringing peace</b>

**SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:**

**John:**

In the Gospel of John, there is no separate Pentecost event; it is always tied in with the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. He breathes on them and gives them his Spirit. The Church is empowered from within by the spirit of Jesus so that it can be the living body of Christ. Its works flow from this dwelling of the Holy Spirit within it. The Church cannot presume to be anything nor to have any divine mission without this power that comes from the spirit of Jesus dwelling within it.

Again, Jesus identifies himself as the Crucified One; if they can identify with him in his suffering, then they will receive power for the works of the resurrection. Of course, Jesus wants the disciples in the Upper Room to know that it is really he: the wounds identify him as the one they had known. Moreover, Jesus shows his wounds so that the Church, too, will know who it is: the one identified with the Crucified Christ. The Church must bear the signs of Christ's suffering and dying in its own body in order to be seen as legitimate. It is not the true Church of Christ if it does not appear to have suffered and died with him. Those signs need to be visible in the body of the Church.

The task of reconciling sinners to one another and to God lies at the very heart of the ministry of Jesus during his earthly life. He most often says to a person whom he is curing of a physical or emotional ailment: "Your sins are forgiven!" The kingdom of God is proclaimed and effectively established as people are reconciled. The kingdom happens when people are at peace with God and with each other. Jesus breathes on his disciples and says "Peace," as his very first utterance after his resurrection. That is what he has come to bring to the world. That is what he gives to his followers. They are no longer alienated from God; they are no longer at odds with one another. There is unity and peace now in the community of disciples.

The Church, which is the body of Christ, is sent to do the works of the living Christ. The Church can have no other mission than to heal and to forgive, to reconcile those who have been alienated from God and from each other by sin. When the community of faith received this gift and this task from the Risen Christ, it came into its own mission. The Church not only became the living presence of Christ in the world, but it was given its job description; it was assigned its primary responsibility: to forgive; to reconcile.

This empowerment for forgiveness cannot be interpreted narrowly. Of course, the Church must exercise the ministry of forgiveness in the celebration of the sacrament of penance or reconciliation. But, that is not the only place or the only way. We shortchange ourselves if our perspective is too narrow here. We shortchange the Church and its mission. People must forgive one another. That's where it all begins.

This kind of forgiveness needs to become habitual and noticeable. We need to become known for our spontaneous forgiving. The Church as an institution must be seen as always forgiving: forgiving debts, forgiving persecution, forgiving attacks, forgiving misinterpretations, forgiving slanders leveled against it. And the Church must ask forgiveness of those it has harmed.

During his papacy, Pope Saint John Paul II asked forgiveness from the Jewish people for all the crimes committed against them by the Church and by its members! Do you remember the press reports on that? So, Pentecost is breaking out all over!

### **Acts:**

Pentecost is a Greek word meaning “fifty days.” It refers to the Feast of Weeks which is celebrated by Jews 50 days after Passover. It is a feast of thanksgiving for the spring harvest of wheat. During the Feast of Weeks, the Jews remember and renew their commitment to the covenant: they belong to God and God belongs to them. Faithfulness is called for. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the community of believers reverses the confusion of Babel. Whereas sin has led to a multiplication of unknown tongues, now God brings human beings back together, so they can hear the many tongues as one, in holiness and grace. Wind and fire are always signs of God’s work, especially associated with the covenant.

### **1 Corinthians:**

The Church at Corinth was as divided as the Church is today. Debates raged as to the priority of certain gifts from God in the life of the believer. Paul points out that the gifts are complementary and meant for the common good. The gift does not give stature to the one who has received it. Rather, it gives a responsibility to share the gift with others. It is designed for the good of the Church. The variety of gifts points only to the generosity of God. God wants all those gifts unified for the proper functioning of the body of believers. Baptism and Eucharist create the unity that will bind all the gifts into one body for the glory of God.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. How is it that forgiveness of sins, one for another, becomes a sign of the kingdom of God? How effective is that sign today? Do you know anyone who should forgive you some harm you have done him or her? Have you asked to be forgiven?
2. “Receive the Holy Spirit!” is a command from Jesus. We receive this command in the sacrament of confirmation. How have we responded to that command in our personal lives? How has the Church community responded? Have you committed some energy to receiving the Holy Spirit? Have you made space for it in your life?
3. Even after Peter had denied knowing Jesus just a few days earlier, Jesus comes now with words of “peace” and “forgiveness” for him and for all. How do we feel when Jesus forgives us after we have sinned?

## **SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION**

During this week, find three ways in which you can exercise the ministry of forgiveness toward someone who has offended or hurt you.

## PRAYER

Prayer from the words and works of the poet John Milton (1608-1674):

*O Holy Spirit of God, who prefers the holy and pure heart to any temple, teach us all truth; what in us is dark, illumine; what is low, raise and support; what is shallow, deepen; that every chapter of our lives may witness to your power and justify the ways of God to all people.  
In the name of Jesus, the giver of all grace. Amen.*

## CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the Church becomes the living body of Christ and is empowered to do the works of Christ in the world. The whole Church, the gathering of all its members, great and small, clergy and laity, is sent by God to continue the saving works of Jesus Christ. All too often we think of the Church as “them” rather than “us.” The Church is more than its leaders. The Holy Spirit came upon the whole Church at Pentecost, not just on its leaders. So, the ministries of the Church are given not only to priests, bishops, and deacons but to all who are baptized into the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit came upon Mary at Nazareth, and she conceived the Son of God in her womb. The Holy Spirit comes upon the assembly of the disciples of Jesus in the Upper Room, and they become the body of Christ in time and space. Through the ages, the Spirit is bestowed on every new generation so that the body of Christ might be present and at work in that generation. The mission of the Church is therefore identical to the mission of Christ: to proclaim the good news of God’s kingdom, to call people to repentance and to faith, to offer praise and thanksgiving to the heavenly Father, to guide all people in the ways of the Gospel. The power of the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the Church community, makes it possible for the Church to fulfill its mission.

The Church must always pray for faithfulness to its mission. Opening its heart to the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church itself is purified of its unfaithfulness and strengthened in grace for the works of the kingdom. Every parish, every family in the parish, every grouping of the faithful, will become effective ministers of the Christian vocation when it is continually being made holy by the power of God in the Holy Spirit.

“Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and there shall be a new creation. And you shall renew the face of the earth.” If ever there was a doctrine of the Church that is neglected in its practical application, it is this one. The average person in the Church, even the clergy, is not often aware of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Most often we go through our days and weeks without much awareness that it is the Holy Spirit that makes us what we are: the living presence of Christ in the world.