

Pentecost Sunday

(Year C)

<i>First Reading</i>	Acts 2:1-11
<i>Response</i>	When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.
<i>Gospel</i>	John 20:19-23

Happy Feast of Pentecost everyone. For this beautiful glorious feast, the Church gives us a wonderful passage for Year C from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, which, if you've read 1 Corinthians you'll know, is very focused on the role and activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church. So, it's very fitting that on the Feast of Pentecost, the second reading would come from 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13. This is the passage on the unity and diversity within the Church, through the agency of the spirit. This is what St. Paul says:

Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.¹

Now it skips down to verse 12.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12 to 13. Okay, so there are a few aspects of this passage, especially for it being chosen on the Feast of Pentecost, that we want to highlight. The first one is this. It's the virtue and the gift of faith. Paul says something really crucial here. He says no one can confess that Jesus is Lord, unless they do so by the Holy Spirit. It's really important. So what Paul is revealing here is if you believe in Jesus, and if you're able to confess that He isn't just the Messiah, but that He's the Kyrios, He's the Lord, you are able to do that only through the agency of the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit working in you to give you the gift of faith. So a very important emphasis here on the role of the Spirit in granting the gift of faith to every member of the body of Christ. It's very crucial.

It's fascinating here that he says, no one can say “Jesus be cursed!” Right? If they have the Spirit. And conversely, no one can say “Jesus is Lord”, except by the Holy Spirit. So it's a very powerful affirmation here of the way the Spirit either does or does not speak through us and speak through our words. And this isn't something Paul's making up. He's getting this, of course, from Jesus himself. You might recall, for example, Matthew 10, when Jesus sends the Apostles out and he says, "Listen, you're going to be brought before governors and kings in order to bear witness. Don't be anxious about what you're going to say, because it's not going to be you who speak, but the Spirit of my Father speaking through you.” Paul's saying the same thing here with reference to the confession of Jesus as Lord. Although it's us saying it, we're full and free human beings, in a very mysterious way it's actually the Holy Spirit speaking through us because faith itself is a gift of the Spirit. That's the first thing that we want to say.

The second thing about this passage that's important on the Feast of Pentecost is its emphasis on the charismatic gifts, right? So when Paul says there are varieties of gifts, the Greek word there is *charisma*. That's the Greek root that we get the word charismatic gift from. And he goes on, although the lectionary doesn't give us this reading in this particular context, it'll do it elsewhere, he goes on to list those different gifts, like wisdom and knowledge and faith, and gifts of healing, so on and so forth. In this case, the Church is just highlighting that the Spirit isn't just the author of faith, the Spirit is also the author of the charismatic gifts. He's the one who bestows these supernatural gifts of wisdom and knowledge and faith, and

healings upon the Church. So again, just as you can't believe without the Holy Spirit, you also can't act in a supernatural way, right? Without the power of the Holy Spirit acting through you and in you.

A third aspect of the passage that's important for the Feast of Pentecost is the Spirit as the agent of unity. This is really interesting. You'll notice that although Paul emphasizes there are varieties of gifts, there are lots of different spiritual gifts, lots of different charismatic gifts in the Church, it's always the one Spirit, the same Spirit, who's the author and animator of them all, right? So he says:

there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one.

Now, you might miss the allusion, but if you were a Jew in the first century and you were hearing these words of Paul, it might make you think of another passage in Scripture that emphasizes the oneness of God, and that's the Shema, right? So, the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy. Basically, the Shema was a kind of creed of the Jews that they would repeat several times a day.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.”

So, it's emphasizing the oneness of God. And Paul's taking that emphasis on the oneness of God, but here he's applying it to the Spirit. It's the same spirit. It's the same Lord. It's the same God. Oh, that's interesting. The spirit, the Lord and God. What does that make you think of? It should make you think of the Holy Spirit, Christ the Son, who's the Lord. When Paul uses the word Lord, he invariably is referring to Jesus. And then God. So Paul, again, when he uses the word God, if you look at it in context, that's his preferred term for speaking about God the Father. So there's an implicit reference in this passage itself to the three persons of the Trinity. The Spirit, the Holy Spirit. The Lord, Jesus Christ the Son. And then God, God the Father. So it's so powerful that on this Feast of Pentecost, which is where we celebrate the public manifestation and revelation of the third person of the Trinity, of the Holy Spirit, that the Church chooses for us a passage from Paul's letters where we have an implicit reference to the three persons of the Holy Trinity, here in First Corinthians 12.

And then the final aspect of this that's important for us to remember is the connection between the Spirit and baptism. So not only is the Holy Spirit the author and agent of our confession of faith. He's the one who bestows the gift of faith on us. Not only is the Holy Spirit the author of the charismatic gifts, the one who gives those gifts to the Church. Not only is he one of the three persons of the Trinity. But he's also the one who comes to us through the gift of Baptism. This is very important. Paul uses this powerful image here where he says:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

So Paul here is using the imagery of the Spirit as the author of Baptism. It's very interesting, very interesting to think about it that way. It was by the Spirit that we were baptized into the Church. And through that Spirit, Paul reveals here the mystery of the Church. Namely, it's the mystery of both unity and diversity within the Church. I don't know if you've ever taken time to ponder this, but this is a great mystery. How is it that we can have one Church, like we profess in the creed? "I believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." And yet, at the very same time, have so much diversity within the church. And I don't just mean diversity of individuals, I think of diversity of states of life amongst all the saints. Can you think of a more diverse body of people? As well as the diversity of rights within the one Church, right?

Even in the liturgy itself, we have diversity between the Roman Rite and the Byzantine Rite or the Coptic Rite or the Armenian Rite. Whatever it might be, the various rites of the liturgy that have come down from the Apostles through the various peoples, they are diverse, but they're also one. They're within the one Catholic Church. How is that possible? How can you maintain unity in the face of so much diversity? Because if you've ever tried to either run a business or some kind of human institution, you realize these things are in tension. They're always in tension. And it's very difficult to achieve unity without destroying diversity, right? Sometimes we want to strive for unity, we end up with uniformity, trying to make everyone into carbon copies of one another. But at the same time, if you overemphasize diversity without unity, you can end up with chaos and a

brokenness. A lack of cohesion, a lack of singleness of purpose that gives the institution, or whatever it might be, its mission.

So Paul here emphasizes that it's the Spirit who both enables the Church to be one in Christ and yet at the same time consists of many different kinds of people, many different persons, whether they be Jews or Greeks, who in the world would've been opposed to one another, or whether they be slaves or free. So again, within human society, these were two groups of people that were often pitted against one another. Here, Paul says that in Christ, these divisions that take place within the earthly human family are overcome. And who is it that overcomes them? Who is it that makes possible unity within diversity? It's the Holy Spirit.

That is why I believe that this passage is chosen for Pentecost in particular, because what happens on the Feast of Pentecost in the Book of Acts, where we had the account of Pentecost itself, is that all the different pilgrims who have gathered for the Feast of Pentecost, who've come from the various nations together to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast. When the Apostles receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and it comes down upon them in the form of tongues of fire, it's through the Spirit indwelling the Apostles who then begin to preach, who begin to speak and say what? "Jesus is Lord." That the divisions between those nations begin to fall down and they are all baptized and become one in the body of Christ.

As Acts tells us in chapter two, Peter baptizes 3000 people on that day, after his sermon on Pentecost. So what Paul's describing here in the Letter to the Corinthians, using the language of these different theological categories, the variety of gifts, the charismatic gifts, faith, baptism, sacramental issues, is what we see being enacted on the Feast of Pentecost itself. So this is just a beautiful, beautiful passage that gives so much insight into the third person of the Holy Trinity, who, let's face it, sometimes gets overlooked, right? A lot of emphasis on God the Father. A lot of emphasis on God the Son. Sometimes we tend to forget about the Holy Spirit. Some people have called him the forgotten person of the Trinity, right? Out of the three, he gets the least attention, but not from St. Paul. St. Paul's very focused on him. And not from the Church, because every year we celebrate the great Feast of Pentecost and the revelation of the spirit.

So in closing, I'd just like to give you one quick little insight into this passage from Saint Thomas Aquinas. In Saint Thomas' commentary on our reading for today,

from 1 Corinthians 12, he draws out one more insight and one more distinction that I didn't bring, but I think is an important one. Namely, the distinction between the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit and the charismatic graces of the Holy Spirit. Maybe you've heard this distinction before. Theologians will sometimes speak about the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, which is the grace by which the Holy Spirit dwells in us, makes us members of the body of Christ, and makes us holy. And then the charismatic graces of the Holy Spirit, which are particular gifts of the Spirit that are given to us for some purpose of building up the Church. That distinction between those two kinds of gifts of the Spirit isn't something that the Catholic Church just made up, or that the tradition just made up. But rather, it actually is based on an interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12, the passage for today, of the way this text has been read in the living tradition of the church. So in his commentary, Aquinas says this, and I'm going to quote him here:

The “manifestation of the Spirit,” in which is designated the office of *charismatic graces* (Latin *gratiae gratis datae*). But it pertains to *sanctifying grace* (Latin *gratiam gratum facientem*) that through it the Holy Spirit indwells, which, indeed, does not pertain to charismatic graces, but only that through them the Holy Spirit is manifested, as the interior motion of the heart through the voice...²

So, pause there. So here, in fact, what Thomas is doing is he's drawing a distinction between two kinds of graces. He says that Paul speaks about the manifestation of the Spirit. He's referring there to charismatic graces, which in Latin, he describes as *gratiae gratis datae*, right? Gifts that are given. And he distinguishes that from sanctifying grace, which indwells the person through the gift of the Holy Spirit, that we receive principally at baptism. What he's going to go on to say is that the charismatic graces that Paul's describing in 1 Corinthians 12 are the particular gifts of the Holy Spirit that he gives to the saints for the building up of the Church. So for example, Thomas continues:

Hence it is said that Stephen, filled with grace, worked prodigies and many signs, whom they chose filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:8). In this way such graces are granted to the saints. And lest such a manifestation seem

² Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* no. 725 [trans. F. R. Larcher]

futile, he adds: “unto profit” (Latin *ad utilitatem*) [1 Cor 12:7], *namely, for the common good* (Latin *communem*)

In other words, what Thomas is saying in his commentary on this verse is that in this passage, Paul is revealing to us that there are certain gifts that are given to members of the body of Christ, not for the interior indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That's given to us at Baptism, but rather for the building up of the common good of the Church. And he gives as an example the miracles worked by St. Stephen in the early days of the Church when the gospel was just beginning to spread. So when it says that Stephen is filled with the Holy Ghost and worked many signs, it isn't just referring to the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. It's also referring to the particular graces given to him by the spirit in order to bring other people to faith in Christ.

And so, in closing, I just think that this would be something on the Feast of Pentecost that it's important to reflect on and to remember. That on the Feast of Pentecost we celebrate not just the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Apostles, and then in us through our Baptism, but also the charismatic graces of the Holy Spirit that are given to each member of the body of Christ for the common good and for the building up of the Church. So if you've never thought about this before, it might be good to take some time to reflect. What are those charismatic gifts that I've been given? What particular gifts has the Holy Spirit given to me so that I can serve the Church and participate in the life and the mission of the Church for the sake of the common good of the Church. Because that's what the Holy Spirit does. That's why he comes on Pentecost. It's not just to fill the Church with sanctifying grace, but it's to order the Church toward the mission of evangelizing the world. And for that mission to take place, we're not just going to need the grace of holiness. We're going to need the charismatic gifts that will enable us to function as members of the body of Christ and draw others into that same mystical body.