

No.10

28th May 2020.

Dear Friends,

This week's newsletter brings us up to the feast of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Our Lady and the Apostles in the Upper Room. They were in a sort of 'lockdown' or 'quarantine' of their own - awaiting the Holy Spirit. We can only guess the anxiety and anticipation they were experiencing.

Our main summary of the talk she would have given is by Ann Bennell. The reflection for our Lectio is by Nick Harden. Many thanks to both of them.

Usually at this stage of the year our RCIA meetings come to an end for the summer! What should happen this particular year - which is anything but usual? In the spirit of 'lockdown' the Team is hoping to have a meeting in a couple of weeks (by Zoom!) to discuss this very question. Also, we hope to discuss what has happened up to now - how things have gone, what has been of benefit, where we could have done better. This is where your comments and views will be most welcome. If you have any contribution please feel free to send your thoughts to me by email at madewaal@hotmail.com. Thanking you in anticipation and wishing you good health.

Keep safe, and God bless.

John de Waal

Pentecost and the Holy Spirit in the church today.

Pentecost comes 50 days after Easter. In the Old Testament, Pentecost was originally an agricultural feast – a harvest festival that came 50 days after Passover. For us, Pentecost is a different feast – it is the day that the Christian Church was born. The first Christians were Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and who continued with their traditional faith and worship but met together in their homes to celebrate the Eucharist. By AD 85 they were considered to be heretics and were no longer welcome in the synagogue.

In the Gospel of the second Sunday of Easter and of Pentecost Sunday (John 20 v19-23) we hear how, “on the first day of the week the disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me so am I sending you.” After this he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit, for those whose sins you forgive they are forgiven for those sins you retain they are retained.”” It is at this point that the eleven become Apostles – this word means “to send forth”. This Breath is one of the signs of the Holy Spirit.

May I recommend that you read Acts 2. The story of Pentecost – how while they were together “Suddenly, there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues as the spirit enabled them to proclaim.” This is followed by Peter’s speech: The Mission.

So, who is the Holy Spirit – this third person of the Blessed Trinity? We have all sorts of names for Him – Paraclete, Advocate, Consoler. He is called The Spirit of Truth, The Spirit of Christ, The Spirit of the Lord, The spirit of God. His actions are there all through the Old Testament and the New. Mary conceived Christ through the Spirit. The power of the Spirit went out of Christ in his acts of healing and saving. It is the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. The Spirit acts as fire, as cloud, as light and as water. He is referred to as the seal, the hand, the finger (of God’s right hand), the dove.

We receive the Spirit firstly at our Baptism through water – the sign of new birth – the Spirit is the living water welling up from Christ crucified and welling up in us to eternal life. At Confirmation we receive the Holy Spirit again with all of his gifts by the anointing of the Bishop.

In Chapter 3 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, there is wonderful teaching on The Holy Spirit. We read, that it is “only The Holy Spirit who understands the thoughts of God and who makes Him known through Christ. Whenever God sends His Son, he always sends His Spirit – their mission is inseparable. When the Father sends His Word he always sends His Breath. It is Christ who is seen but The Spirit who reveals Him. Those who believe in Christ, know the Spirit because He dwells in them.

When Jesus went back to the Father he left us his Body and Blood to feed and nourish us in the Eucharist. He also gave us His Spirit to be with us always. It is the Spirit that is in every good thing that we do and encourages us to do what we alone can do; share Christ with the world.

Sources: 1) The Catechism of the Catholic Church.
2) Dictionary of the Bible
3) The Catholic Study Bible

Lectio using Jer 31:31-34.

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. ³³ But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Reflection on Jer 31:31-34.

Jeremiah is the archetypal *Prophet of doom*. He had to tell the people of Judah that God was going to punish their sins and that the Babylonians would destroy Jerusalem. It is a story not only of the fulfilment of God’s judgement, but also

contains the promise of hope. This hope for the future is the subject of our passage here.

These beautiful verses provide us with rich fare for contemplation and consequently I will try to keep my reflection to a minimum. They point to Christ the Messiah, the bringer of the New Covenant. In Jesus, the Law is no longer engraved on ‘tablets of stone’, but ‘upon the heart. As a result, this New Covenant is superior to the Old in at least three ways:

- It is unbreakable (heart not stone)
- Internal not external (heart not stone)
- Direct (from God) not indirect (through Moses)

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews quotes our very passage when talking about Christ, the New Covenant, in Heb 8:6-13:

⁶ “Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. ⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second.

⁸ For he finds fault with them when he says:

“The days will come, says the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; ⁹ not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and so I paid no heed to them, says the Lord. ¹⁰ This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

¹¹ And they shall not teach every one his fellow or every one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”

¹³ In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete.”

As we reflect on these two passages, it is worth remembering that:

“Contemplative prayer is the simplest expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gift, a grace; it can be accepted only in humility and poverty. Contemplative prayer is a covenant relationship established by God within our hearts.^(jer 31:33) Contemplative

prayer is a *communion* in which the Holy Trinity conforms man, the image of God, 'to his likeness'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2713).

We pray that we may be conformed to the likeness of Christ, perhaps turning to Saint Ignatius Loyola for advice: "Keep your soul in peace. Let God work in you. Welcome thoughts that raise your heart to God. Open wide the window of your soul."

A final thought :

"Only man can be absurd : for only man can be dignified."

G.K.Chesterton