



Pentecost

John 20:19-23

19 In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you,' 20 and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, 21 and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you.

'As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.'

22 After saying this he breathed on them and said:

'Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.'

Other readings: Acts 2:1-11 Psalm 103 (104) 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13

This gospel reading for the feast of Pentecost has already been read, in a more extended form, on the Second Sunday of Easter. It was read then to include Jesus' encounter with Thomas 'eight days later'. On the feast of Pentecost we have the opportunity to focus on the earlier verses, in which Jesus brings the gift of peace and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The account of the day of Pentecost is found in our first reading, from the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Fifty days after the resurrection there was a spectacular manifestation of the power of the Spirit. Jews and proselytes, gathered from the nations for the Jewish feast of Pentecost, witness the power of the Spirit and hear the preaching of the apostles each in his own tongue. This event launches the mission to the whole world.

Our gospel teaches that the Holy Spirit was also given by the risen Christ before the events of Pentecost. This is a quieter and more intimate demonstration of the power of the Spirit. It is related to the preaching of forgiveness and the possibility of new life for those who ask for it. The disciples are empowered to bring the forgiveness of Christ, but it is possible for people to reject this forgiveness. This seems to be the sense of the final verse, that some have their sins retained.

This is the final day of the Easter period. The Lord who died on the cross has shown himself in his risen body. He has taken our humanity into the presence of the Father. He is no longer visibly present, but his Spirit is with us to remind us of Jesus and to lead us into all truth. That Spirit, as St Paul writes to the Corinthians, bestows gifts in abundance for the benefit of the whole Church.

Do I allow the Holy Spirit to transform my life?

Do I seek the peace and forgiveness offered to me through prayer and the sacraments?

Pray for the whole church, that Christians everywhere will be enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

Pray that the Easter gifts of Christ will always be with us.