

Readings and Reflection

First reading Genesis 11:1-9

The tower of Babel

Throughout the earth men spoke the same language, with the same vocabulary. Now as they moved eastwards they found a plain in the land of Shinar where they settled. They said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them in the fire.' (For stone they used bricks, and for mortar they used bitumen). 'Come,' they said 'let us build ourselves a town and a tower with its top reaching heaven. Let us make a name for ourselves, so that we may not be scattered about the whole earth.' Now the Lord came down to see the town and the tower that the sons of man had built. 'So they are all a single people with a single language!' said the Lord. 'This is but the start of their undertakings! There will be nothing too hard for them to do. Come, let us go down and confuse their language on the spot so that they can no longer understand one another.' The Lord scattered them thence over the whole face of the earth, and they stopped building the town. It was named Babel therefore, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth. It was from there that the Lord scattered them over the whole face of the earth.

Responsorial Psalm 103(104):1-2,24,27-30,35

Send forth your spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth.

Bless the Lord, my soul!
Lord God, how great you are,
clothed in majesty and glory,
wrapped in light as in a robe!

How many are your works, O Lord!
In wisdom you have made them all.
The earth is full of your riches.
Bless the Lord, my soul.

All of these look to you
to give them their food in due season.
You give it, they gather it up:
you open your hand, they have their fill.

You take back your spirit, they die,
returning to the dust from which they came.
You send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the earth.

Second reading Romans 8:22-27

The Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words

From the beginning till now the entire creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth; and not only creation, but all of us who possess the first-fruits of the Spirit, we too groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to be set free. For we must be content to hope that we shall be saved – our salvation is not in sight, we should not have to be hoping for it if it were – but, as I say, we must hope to be saved since we are not saved yet – it is something we must wait for with patience.

Pentecost Sunday

19th May

The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness. For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words, and God who knows everything in our hearts knows perfectly well what he means, and that the pleas of the saints expressed by the Spirit are according to the mind of God.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia!

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Alleluia!

Gospel John 7:37-39

'If any man is thirsty, let him come to me!'

On the last day and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood there and cried out:

'If any man is thirsty, let him come to me!

Let the man come and drink who believes in me!

As scripture says: From his breast shall flow fountains of living water.

He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for there was no Spirit as yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

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Feast Days this Week

Monday 20th May: Mary Mother of the Church

Tuesday 21st May: St Christopher Magallanes and his Companions

Wednesday 22nd May: St Rita of Cascia

Thursday 23rd May: Our Lord Jesus Christ the Eternal High Priest

Friday 24th May: Mary, Help of Christians

Saturday 18th May: Se Bede the Venerable

In the Catholic tradition, a Homily, interprets the readings, shining a light on the present and asking each one of us what we must change in our lives, from today. The challenge is not so much about recounting the history or retelling the story, but living the gospel.

The Spirit who bears fruit

In our churches there is no shortage of images, mostly statues, paintings or stained glass. They are mostly images of Jesus, Mary and the saints. There are also images of some Old Testament figures like Abraham and Sarah, or Moses and Miriam. There is a long tradition of images within the church, beginning with the paintings in the Roman Catacombs. The Holy Spirit, whose feast we celebrate on Pentecost, does not lend itself easily to imagery. The traditional image of the dove is drawn from the scene of the baptism of Jesus. But the language in that passage is rather vague; the Holy Spirit descended like a dove, or in the way that a dove might descend. There are two other images of the Holy Spirit in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles. Luke says that all who gathered in one room heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven; he goes on to say that something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire. Just as the evangelists do not portray an actual dove at the baptism of Jesus, Luke does not say that the wind and fire at Pentecost were tangible phenomena. The Holy Spirit is impossible to visualise, because the Spirit cannot be seen as such. Yet the Holy Spirit is profoundly real.

Many things in our universe are real even though invisible to the naked eye. What we see with our eyes is only a fraction of our physical world. The Holy Spirit belongs to the spiritual world, and it naturally cannot see the Spirit with our eyes. Yet, there are helpful ways of imagining the Holy Spirit. St Paul uses an image drawn from nature when he says that the Spirit bears fruit. He means the visible effect of the Spirit on one's life. We may not be able to see the Holy Spirit, but we can see the effect of the Spirit in our life, just as we cannot see the wind but can see the effect of the wind on people and objects of various kinds. Paul is saying that wherever we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control, the Spirit is there at work. The Spirit becomes visible in and through these qualities and virtues. The person who most of all had those qualities was Jesus because he was full of the Holy Spirit, full of the life of God. The Holy Spirit is essentially the very life of God, and that life is a life of love. It is that divine life, that divine love, which was poured out at Pentecost, initially on the first disciples but through them on all who were open to receive this powerful and wonderful gift. Paul expresses it simply in his letter to the Romans, 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us'. It is that Spirit of God's love we have received who bears the rich fruit in our lives that Paul speaks about in today's 2nd Reading. The Spirit is constantly at work in our lives, making us more like Jesus. The ordinary, day to day expressions of goodness and kindness, of faithfulness and self-control, of patience and gentleness, are all manifestations of the Spirit that has been given to us by God. We can recognise the Spirit's presence in the common happenings of everyday life. The spiritual is not something other-worldly; it is humanity at its best.

Humanity is at its best in today's first reading. Pentecost brought about a wonderful bonding of people from all over the Roman Empire. They were united in admiring and praising the marvels of God. In spite of differences of language and culture there was a real communion among them. Wherever communion of heart and mind exist among people of different backgrounds, the Holy Spirit is at work. Unity in diversity is the mark of the Spirit. Jesus points out another manifestation of the Spirit: the pursuit of truth. Only the Spirit can lead us to the complete truth. If someone is genuinely seeking for truth, and willing to engage in good works with others, there the Spirit is at work. Fullness of truth and love is always beyond us; but the Spirit is given to lead us towards the complete truth and love, in all its height and depth.

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The Cycle of Prayer**The Church**

Especially on Pentecost

Background

Throughout the Season of Easter the first reading at Mass is taken from the Acts of the Apostles. Luke tells the story of the early Church from the Ascension and Pentecost to the early missions of the apostles.

"When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church." Then "the Church was openly displayed to the crowds and the spread of the Gospel among the nations, through preaching, was begun." As the "convocation" of all men for salvation, the Church in her very nature is missionary, sent by Christ to all the nations to make disciples of them." Catechism 767

"Those who with God's help have welcomed Christ's call and freely responded to it are urged on by love of Christ to proclaim the Good News everywhere in the world. This treasure, received from the apostles, has been faithfully guarded by their successors. All Christ's faithful are called to hand it on from generation to generation, by professing the faith, by living it in fraternal sharing, and by celebrating it in liturgy and prayer." Catechism 3

Prayer

God our Father, in all the churches scattered throughout the world you show forth the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

Through the gospel and the eucharist bring your people together in the Holy Spirit and guide us in love.

Make us a sign of your love for all people, and help us show forth the living presence of Christ in the world.

Roman Missal