

THE SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST

THE EIGHTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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Sun. **THE SOLEMNITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S COMING**
May 23 **LIVING IN THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT**
A reflection taken from a homily by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

Mon. **Memorial of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of the Church**
24 **MARY'S VOICE INSPIRES THE CHURCH**
Fr. Basil Pennington, OCSO

Tues. **The Memorial of St. Bede the Venerable**
25 **KNOWING GOD IN THE SPIRIT**
Developed from a homily by St. Bede the Venerable

Wed. **Monthly Remembrance of the Dead**
26 **ACCEPTING THE GIFT THAT IS COMMUNITY**
From Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Thurs. **Memorial of St Augustine of Canterbury**
27 **The Message that Converted England**
A History by the Venerable Bede

MONASTIC DESERT DAY

Fri. **Friday of the 8th Week of Eastertide**
28 **DAILY TRUST IN THE LORD'S PRESENCE**
A reflection taken from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny

Sat. **Saturday of the 8th Week of Eastertide**
29 **WE ARE ALL CALLED TO BE EVANGELISTS**
A reflection from Evangelii Nuntiandi by St. Pope Paul VI

Sunday

LIVING IN THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

A reflection taken from a homily by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

The Holy Solemnity of the Spirit puts new heart into us. Not only do we experience the gift of the dignity of God's own children but we experience delight. On this feast it is love that we specially honor. Among human beings there is no word more pleasant to hear and no thought more delightful to dwell on than love. The love that we celebrate is nothing other than the goodness, kindness, and charity of God. God is personally goodness, kindness and charity. God's goodness, moreover, is identical with the Spirit, with God's very self.

In disposing all things, the Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world from the beginning. The Spirit reaches from one end to the other of the world and delicately disposes everything to receive God's gifts. As sanctifier the Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world. In a special way this was re-begun at Pentecost. On this day the gracious Spirit was itself sent by the Heavenly Father and the Only Son on a new mission, in a new way, and through a new manifestation of mighty power. The sending was for the sanctification of every creature. Before Jesus was glorified the Spirit had not been given, but today the Spirit came forth from the Heavenly Throne to give God's self in endlessly abundant richness to the human race. It was a divine outpouring that is to pervade the whole, wide world and be manifest in myriad spiritual endowments.

Where could such an overflowing of delight come from if not from heaven? Not many days previously heaven received from earth a fruit of wonderful sweetness and beauty. Did our land ever yield a fruit more pleasant than the Lord Jesus? He is sweeter, more pleasant, holier and most delectable. Indeed, faithfulness has sprung up from the earth! A few days ago, we sent Christ on ahead of us to the Heavenly Kingdom so we might have in return all that Heaven held that would be sweet to our longing.

The full sweetness of earth is Christ's humanity. The full sweetness of Heaven is Christ's Spirit. Christ's humanity ascended from us to heaven and Christ's Spirit has come down upon us. Now indeed does the Spirit of the Lord fill the whole world. All creation recognizes his voice. Everywhere the Spirit is at work, everywhere the Spirit speaks. The Lord said, "Receive the Holy Spirit; if you forgive anyone's sins they are forgiven". But before the day of Pentecost the Spirit's voice was, in a sense, still unheard. His power has not yet leaped forth, nor had the disciples come to know the Spirit truly. They were still in the grip of fear, cowering behind closed doors.

From Pentecost day onward, the voice of the Lord has resounded. The God of majesty has thundered and made his voice heard. The voice of the Lord strikes flaming fire, the voice of the Lord shakes the desert and stirs the wilderness, the voice of the Lord strips the forest bare and all cry glory. How do we join our voices to the Lord's? We cry out, as the Lord Jesus did from the cross, with words of mercy and love. That is what our lives must cry out each day and hour that we live. Glory to God forever!

Monday

MARY'S VOICE INSPIRES THE CHURCH

Fr. Basil Pennington, OCSO

Mary's Yes to God was so total that He formed in her, in very flesh and in her flesh, Christ the only Son, even as he made her to be the one of all creation to be most identified with Him. To the extent that we too, say Yes will the Father through the Spirit form His Son in us, form us into His Son. In this sense Mary is our mother and the mother of the Church.

Mary never rested on her newly acquired dignity. The Lord's message had indicated to her a need: your cousin Elizabeth has, in her old age herself conceived a son.....". One who in truth is the servant of the Lord is the servant of all the people of the Lord. With the fearlessness born of faith- even when knowing all the fears of the first hours of a first pregnancy-and impelled by love, the young woman from Nazareth sets out across the alien land of the Samaritans into the sophistication of suburbia to offer her humble service.

But see what happens: "As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child in her womb leapt for joy, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit". Mary had not come with a mind to fulfill an apostolic mission, to be the bearer of the Good News, of the living Word of God. She came but to render a simple human service, to do an act of kindness, to respond to a real human need. Yet her merest presence, her simple arrival, brought life and grace and the powerful presence of the Spirit.

And so, it us with us, the Church. If we but listen to the word and open ourselves in deep prayer, say our existential Yes and let the Most High form Christ in us, then as we go about our simple daily human duties we will be bringing Christ, His life, His love, His Spirit to each one we meet and greet. No one can give what they themselves do not have. But having, it is given, without our conscious effort or intent. For this is the Lord's doing -and it is wonderful in our sight.

May Mary, Mother of the Church inspire us to say the same Yes which she did.

Tuesday

KNOWING GOD IN THE SPIRIT

A reflection taken from a homily by St. Bede the Venerable

The evangelists in the Gospels make clear that all grace and truth come through Jesus Christ. They add: “No one has ever seen God; the Only-Begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father has told us about God”. No greater grace and no higher truth can be given to human beings. This is repeated in many ways. For instance, Jesus declares “Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God”. But notice how the emphasis varies: “Now this is eternal life, that they recognize you, the one, true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”. It seems, however, that seeing God belongs only to the next world since we are also told: “No one has ever seen God” and Moses was told “no one sees my face and lives”. And in the Letter to Timothy it is said, “no human being has seen or can see” God.

What the patriarchs and prophets saw was a vision or an image and not God directly. The holy one’s saw God through a subordinate creature, for instance, through fire or an angel or a cloud or lightening. Those who are still within the weak vessel of human flesh can see God through circumscribed images of created things but are in no way capable of looking at his uncircumscribed radiance as it is in eternity.

Yet the evangelists speak about the longing to come to the vision of the unchangeable and eternal radiance and add that, “The only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, has told us about God”. The Lord seem to reinforce this in saying, “no one comes to the Father except through me” and “no one knows the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him”. By the guidance of the Son, we are to know God. And the key to this is the Spirit, the gift of the Father to the Son and of the Father and Son to us.

By imbuing us with the sacraments of his incarnation and sanctifying us by the charismatic gifts of the Spirit, he makes us capable of coming to what we so long for. So, we hear how the faithful are to hasten to contemplation and by what actions they are to come to God. It isn’t only that the Son will declare God, or manifest to human beings the glory of the Holy and indivisible Trinity after the resurrection. Notice what Jesus says, “One who loves me is loved by the Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him”. Remember that he has said, “One who sees me sees the Father”. This is because the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son and because to “see” God is to share God’s life. God is love and share God’s life is to share God’s love as shown us through the Son. You have received the Spirit who is God and is God’s love. So, you have God and God’s love living in you. The more completely, then, that we love as Jesus loves the more completely, we know God. This is the way we begin to “see” God even now. The complete fullness of this knowledge comes only in God’s Kingdom but even now we begin to know. Know by loving and know that loving is knowledge of God.

Wednesday

ACCEPTING THE GIFT THAT IS COMMUNITY **From Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini**

Community is a gift. It isn't founded on our collaborative efforts, nor on our sincere desire for friendship. These things are important and must be kept in mind but 'being together', as it is called in the New Testament, is a gift from God. It is a participation in the 'being together' that we call the Trinity. We find the model of this in Jesus being together with his disciples. God shares this Trinitarian community with the Church and in the Church each how to share in this community experience.

We are not only together with other now-living members of Christ but with those who have left this world and entered that of God's Kingdom of everlasting life. As long as we are joined in Christ, we are together with one another. This means that we are helping and being helped by all who are together in this way. By accepting the Word of God, we become members of an authentic community in Christ, living according to the laws of Trinitarian fellowship; i.e., of mutual love.

Lived Christian fellowship begins in the heart. It is from within that intentions come and from them come acts of love, or its opposite. The failure of love and the dominance of evil intentions are what causes division and all that results. But we know that people bound in fellowship with us in Christ are animated by love, a love like Christ's that fills hearts. Those who are already with God are filled with love for us; it is inseparable from their love for God. Are we mindful of their love? Are we always aware, in some way, that we are loved actively and without hesitation by the many who have gone before us, especially those we knew and were joined with in fellowship already upon this earth?

A description of a community based on charity is given us in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians. We are told this charity lives on God's word as ordinary life depends on breathing. The Word of God, not just the Scriptures but Christ, dwells all around us and within us. A Christian community finds in this its Bread of Life. This bread is an indispensable food for community.

Listen to St. Ambrose: "When I read the Divine Scriptures God returns to walk in the earthly paradise. Christ and Divine Scripture are the remedy for every distasteful thing and the only refuge from temptation." What is temptation but the pull of something or someone other than God, hinting that it can free us from whatever is bothering or worrying us at present. But that is a lie. We turn to God and to God's Word, and we do this not simply on our own but by the help of others, itself given us in love and as a sign of love.

We remember those who have gone before us, and we remember how they persevered to the end in clinging to God and God's promises, especially by recalling Scripture passages to their mind and praying with them. To think of these friends is to be drawn to God and to God's promises. What more do we need than this gift of grace? In it we are actively united around God and in love. This is part of God's gift of community.

Thursday

The Message that Converted England A History by the Venerable Bede

It was in the Isle of Thanet that Augustine and his 40 companions landed. They had brought interpreters from among the Franks and King Ethelbert of Kent had heard of the Christian religion, having a Christian wife of the Frankish royal house named Bertha whom he had married on condition that she should have freedom to hold and practice her faith unhindered, with Bishop Liuhard as her chaplain. Augustine sent messengers to Ethelbert, saying they came from Rome bearing glad news which infallibly assured all who would receive it of eternal joy in heaven with the living and true God.

On receiving this message, the king ordered them to remain in the island and give directions that they were to be provided with all necessaries until he should decide what action to take. After some days, the king came to the island and, sitting down in the open air, summoned Augustine and his companions to an audience. The monks approached the king carrying a silver cross and the likeness of our Lord and Savior painted on a board. First of all, they offered prayer to God, singing a litany and when, at the king's command, Augustine had sat down and preached the word of life to the king and his court, the king said: "Your words and promises are fair indeed, but they are new and strange to us and I cannot accept them and abandon the age-old beliefs of the whole English nation. But since you have travelled far and are sincere in your desire to instruct us in what you believe to be true and excellent, we will not harm you. We will receive you hospitably and take care to supply you with all that you need, nor will we forbid you to preach and win any people you can to your religion."

The king then granted them a dwelling in the city of Canterbury, the chief city of his realm, and he allowed them provisions and did not withdraw their freedom to preach. As soon as they had occupied the house they began to emulate the life of the apostles and the primitive Church. They were constantly at prayer; they fasted and kept vigils; they preached the word of life to whomsoever they could. They accepted only the necessary food from those they taught. They practiced what they preached, and were willing to endure any hardship, and even to die for the Faith they proclaimed. A number of heathen, admiring the simplicity of their holy lives and the comfort of their heavenly message, believed and were baptized. On the east side of the city stood an old church, built in honor of St. Martin during the Roman occupation of Britain. Here they first assembled to sing psalms, to pray, to say Mass, to preach and to baptize.

At length the king and others, edified by the pure lives of these holy men and their gracious promises, the truth of which they confirmed by many miracles, believed and were baptized. Thenceforward great numbers gathered each day to hear the word of God, forsaking their heathen rites, and entering the unity of Christ's holy Church as believers. While the king was pleased at their faith and conversion, he would not compel anyone to accept Christianity, for he had learned from his instructors and guides to salvation that the service of Christ must be accepted freely.

Friday

DAILY TRUST IN THE LORD'S PRESENCE

A reflection taken from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny

“Father, while I was with them, I kept them in your name.” This was the Lord’s prayer on the eve of his passion. Does it imply that the Lord will withdraw his care when he has ascended and sent the Spirit as his own “paraclete”? Of course not. The name “paraclete” means “comforter at one’s side”. The Lord is with us always, especially after the Coming of the Spirit. He who in Heaven directs and governs the hosts of angels has chosen a small group to be his associates and representatives on earth. The Lord instructed them in person until the time when their hearts were sufficiently opened to be led by the Spirit. Christ loved these little ones with a love worthy of his greatness. Having called them away from secular pursuits and ambitions, they now rely on him alone.

But when the moment had come to leave the disciples, He was overwhelmed by the depth of his affection for them and unable to disguise his overflowing tenderness. Hence the Evangelist’s words: “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” He laid bare the strength of his love for his friends before pouring himself out like water for them and also gave to them the sacrament of his Body and Blood.

It is difficult to say which is more wonderful, the power of his love in devising this new means for remaining with them, or his longing to console them. In spite of withdrawing his bodily presence he remained not only with them but in them. That is the power of this sacrament. He prayed, “Father, while I was with them in the world, I kept them in your name and none is lost except the one destined to be lost. And now I am coming to you, so keep those you have given me in your Name.” The whole of his prayer can be summarized under three heads. First, that the disciples are to be kept from evil. Second, that they are to be sanctified in the truth. Third, that they are to be glorified with Him. “Father, I long that those you have given me be with me where I am.”

And he promised them that the Spirit should be for them and see that his prayer would be fulfilled. Just what he has himself been for them so would the Spirit be. Happy are those who have the Spirit as their advocate, pleasing for them always. Yes, the Spirit must be adored with as much honor and love as the one to whom he prays on our behalf. The Father will not refuse him, even as he didn’t refuse the Only Son. The Spirit shares with Father and Son the single will and power that is God’s alone.

All is bound to be accomplished that is requested by Christ and the Spirit. Their word is all-powerful. Their will is wholly efficacious. We know that God spoke and everything came to exist; God spoke, and it was done, commanded and all existed. And Jesus has prayed: “I desire that where I am, they too may be!” What a certainty believers have! It is not a certain only for apostles or their companions. It is for all those who believe through their word. That is Jesus’ own prayer. Be assured and certain. The Spirit is caring for you.

Saturday

WE ARE ALL CALLED TO BE EVANGELISTS

A reflection taken from Evangelii Nuntiandi by St. Pope Paul VI

Only after the descent of the Spirit did the apostles set out for the ends of the earth to begin the great task of evangelizing. This was interpreted by St. Peter as a fulfillment of a prophesy by Joel: "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh". Peter had been empowered by the Spirit to proclaim publicly that Jesus is the Son of God. In the same way Paul was filled with the Spirit before he embarked on his ministry. Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, was chosen for ministry and later bore witness by his own blood. The Spirit fell upon all who accepted God's word.

The Church grows by being filled with the consoling presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the principle of its life. The Spirit enables believers to understand the mystery of Christ and his teaching. As the Spirit was active in the initial stages of the Church so it is now at work in each and every person who proclaims the gospel message and is open to its guidance. The Spirit disposes the hearts of hearers to accept this message.

There are many techniques for evangelizing, but even the best is no substitute for the hidden working of the Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit no amount of study or preparation is of any avail. The clearest reasoning is powerless to persuade the human heart, unless the Spirit prompts it. It doesn't matter what science or discipline one argues from, only the power of the Spirit produces results.

That the present time is a privileged moment of the Spirit for the Church is a fact we are very conscious of today. Everywhere believers seek to understand the Spirit revealed in the Scriptures. Unfurling their sails to catch the Spirit's breath, many gladly entrust themselves to the Spirit's guidance. People gather together in large numbers to pray and give themselves as agents of the Spirit. The influence of the Spirit is paramount. It was no mere chance that the first steps in preaching the gospel were taken on Pentecost.

All this makes it easy to see that the initiative of spreading the Gospel comes from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit prompts the proclamation and opens the hearts of hearers to understand and accept the word of salvation. The Spirit can even be called the goal of evangelization. That is because the Spirit brings the New Creation into being. The Spirit alone fashions the New Humanity that all evangelization aims at—that unity in diversity which the Gospel necessarily calls forth. It is due to the Spirit that the gospel message permeates the world. The Spirit alone enables evangelists to read the God-given signs of the times and explain their concrete significance in given circumstances. We are all called to participate in this great endeavor; we have all received the Spirit. Let the Spirit guide you to recognize how to do your part! If you can love as Christ loves then you can be a Spirit-guided evangelist whatever your life may be like.