

It is clear that the readings we have for today contain a particular significance, for the first one is used for all three cycles (A-C), while the second reading and Gospel for today (year A) can also be used for the other two years (B & C) as well. It is not often that the same readings are used for all three cycles, so we should pay special attention to what God is saying to us through them.

The first reading is the account of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. We are told how there was the sound of a strong wind, while visually tongues of fire appeared over the heads of each one of them. The result was that they were all filled with courage, while knowledge of all that Christ taught them came clearly to their minds, enabling them to teach it to others. Finally, they were moved to actually go out and tell others of the good news: the coming of the Savior and the bestowal of the Sacraments (entrance into the Church) for those who believed.

But was this something which was just for them at that particular occasion? Considering today, is this something which is only those who are doing missionary work, or priests performing their sacred duties? No, this is something we are all called to receive, although the specific gifts which are bestowed varied from person to person. I am referring to our all being called to be saints, to be people whose wills are fully united to God's, acting only out of love for Him.

I have mentioned before how there are three standard ways which are commonly referred to concerning one's growth in the spiritual life: the purgative, illuminative and unitive way; the end of which is sanctity. Let us consider briefly how the apostles went through each of these themselves.

We can say from the time Jesus called them up to the time of His passion, they were beginners in the spiritual life. Most were already practicing their Jewish faith, while others were led to conversion. Since they began to follow Jesus, the beginning of their being purged or purified, they were turning from the world and instead to Him. Most accepted this growth in the faith and spirit of detachment, while Judas, on the contrary, in time turned from this offer of grace, leading to his eventual fall. This is equivalent to any soul who feels drawn to prayer and spiritual reading or talks, putting aside superfluous activities and giving more

attention to God. But this only goes so far before one has to decide (even though it may be gradual and with many occasions) whether to continue to come closer to God, or to turn back to the world by praying less and less, as did Judas. There are trials at this time which both test and purify such a soul. With the apostles, this was at its most intense point when they experienced Jesus' being arrested and crucified. Considering this helps us to embrace the crosses in our own lives.

Next we have the time of illumination. This was the period which began when Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to the apostles, instructing them and granting them grace. With most souls, it is a matter of their persevering in living out their faith and life of prayer, which results in their coming to understand the faith and teachings of the Church to a greater extent and depth. They can be involved with the world (as most have to in some way), while not seeking happiness from it (not seeing it as an end). This is truly spiritual growth, while such a one is not yet fully united to God (although is closer than those in the earlier stage). The apostles were filled with joy at times (when Christ was there), but also had to experience painful darkness, particularly between the time of the ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit. At this time one is both consoled by prayer, while at other times pained by seeing his/her own misery (in a healthy not scrupulous way). Both should be embraced as did the apostles.

Finally we have the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, filling them with His gifts and leading them to sharing the faith with others. So it is when a soul is united with God. It no longer thinks of itself, but only of God, while having a thirst for bringing others to Him as well. And as one can always grow in grace, so did the apostles, even after Pentecost Sunday. Recall that later on, during times of persecution, they prayed for strength and thus received the Holy Spirit even more. So should souls always seek to be closer to God that they may love Him all the more, being strengthened by His divine love and being made all the more ready to reach out to other souls. Thus the apostles went out from the room and began to preach to all who were there at that time.

In the second reading, Saint Paul shows how one speaks of the faith primarily by the gift of the Holy Spirit. He then shows what is common among all who follow Christ and love by the Holy Spirit: stating that while certain people receive certain gifts, what is common to all is loving God and neighbor with the Divine Love of the Holy Spirit. Thus we have some who are active teachers of the faith, who reach

out to others by various ministries, while there are others who have more of a life of prayer and sacrifice for the same end (causing souls to be open to the truth they hear from others). These are different ministries, while all are the work of the Holy Spirit, done out of love for God. This love is the end of the spiritual life, and is something all in heaven will practice for all eternity.

Finally in the Gospel we go back in time (so to say) as this was before the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is valuable as it answers our question of what we must do to be open to receiving the Holy Spirit. The apostles were at that time praying in the upper room with Mary, something which they continued to do after the ascension as well. Notice that first they were praying. Having prayer as part of one's life is vital no matter what state or vocation one is called to live. Some may have more time for prayer, others less; but there must always be a significant amount of time. Secondly, one must have Mary with him/her as did the apostles. Mary was already filled with the Holy Spirit, and continued to grow as such until the day she went to Heaven. So we must all have Mary in our lives, turning to her as our Loving Mother that it may so for us as well. She helps us to be open to the Holy Spirit, Whom she asks to come down upon us and dwell within us, just as she did for the apostles who were praying with her. Then we, as it was with the apostles, can be filled with Divine Love so that we can love with the Love of the Holy Spirit, the Love of the Father and the Son of the Holy Trinity. This is how we return love properly to God, while being enflamed with a burning love for our neighbors. This is all by, with and through Mary.

Loving Mother Mary, spouse of the Holy Spirit, please be with each one of us as thou wast with the apostles, that we may receive the Holy Spirit all the more, and thus grow in divine love! So may it be for all souls. Amen.