Lectio Divina – Feast of Pentecost Year A

Contexts

John’s Gospel – in brief

* **Structure of John’s Gospel**

**1:1-18:** **Prologue** – An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word.

**1:19-12:50: Part One: The Book of Signs**: the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him.

**Chapter 6** – Jesus, the Bread of Life is right in the middle of The Book of Signs – a central text in more ways than one!

**13:1-20:31: Part Two: The Book of Glory**: To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection and ascension. **Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.**

**21:1-25: Epilogue**: Galilean resurrection appearances and second conclusion.

* It is the only Gospel to call Jesus “God”.
* Purpose of Gospel is so that those who follow Jesus might have the kind of faith that would give them eternal life, namely, the faith that Jesus was God’s only Son, possessing God’s own life and had come into the world from above that people might be given that life (and thus be begotten by God) and become God’s children. (Raymond Brown SS)
* Jesus is ‘The Bread of Life’ who feeds, nourishes and sustains the children of God.

John 20: 19-23 – things to notice

* We head this Gospel of 2nd Sunday of Easter.
* In John’s Gospel the Spirit is given and the disciples are commissioned on the day of Jesus’ resurrection.
* Note the condition of the disciples (not just apostles!) – huddled in a room with locked doors, uncertain and afraid.
* The doors are locked ‘for fear of the Jews’ – this does not necessarily mean that any Jews are obviously threatening them. It probably only means that the disciples themselves were afraid of what *might* happen.
* Jesus comes and stands among them – he does not enter through the door.
* His first words are: Peace – Jesus speaks peace in the midst of anxiety and fear.
* and he shows them his hands and side (proof that he really is Jesus)
* The disciples are overjoyed – note there is no hint of doubt (as in Luke) or hesitation.
* Jesus speaks peace to them again.
* Jesus commissions the disciples: “As the Father sent me, so I am sending you…” The disciples are now to represent Jesus to the world.
* He breathes on them – there is a whole biblical tradition of ‘breath’ and ‘the breath of God’: God breathes life into the man in the creation story; Job, Ezekiel, Isaiah and the Psalms all talk about the breath of God; God’s breath in the form of a mighty wind drove back the sea and allowed Israel to cross over from Egypt; Luke (first reading) talks about the ‘mighty wind’ which accompanied the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples, etc.
* and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit”. Note the difference in Luke where the Holy Spirit will not be given for 40 more days.
* “For those who sins you forgive they are forgiven….” It is not easy to understand this verse exactly since the Gospel of John only ever speaks of sin as unbelief. This should not be understood as the power to forgive sins being entrusted to a priest in the sacrament of Reconciliation. “This ‘power’ of forgiveness is probably expressed in the bestowing of the Sprit on those who believe as a result of the disciples mission and who join the community, rather than a process of dealing with Christians who have committed sin (as in Matthew 18:19)” – Jerome Biblical Commentary.
* Part of the confusion arises for a very similar expression about Peter’s authority in Matthew 16:19 which talks about his power ‘to bind and loose’.
* The transforming power of the Spirit forgives sin and makes whole.
* Disciples (the Church) do seem to be given the mission to proclaim the forgiveness of sin, but that will depend on each individually. If they forgive others, they set them free; if not, they hold the other in the bond of sin.
* Mary Coloe points out that the second part of the original text does not actually contain the word ‘sin’ ‘and is better understood to mean *holding firm to one another in community*: ‘whoever you hold are held’. Mary says that the disciples’ mission is to forgive sin and to gather people.’ In Jesus’ prayer on the eve of his *hour*, he had prayed, “While I was with them I kept them in your name….; I have guarded them and none of them is lost” (17:12) Now the task of *keeping* and *guarding* is passed onto the disciples.’

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

At Pentecost we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to the first group of Christian believers - the disciples. This gift of the Holy Spirit is the culmination of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is the enduring way in which Jesus remains present in the Church and in the life of each person – even if we are not aware of it.

It would be wrong to think that this gift happened only once, in one moment of history. In fact, the gifting of the Holy Spirit is a continuing event in the life of every believing person and, therefore, in every age of human history.

It would also be wrong to pray on Pentecost Sunday that we, too, may receive the Spirit – as though we had not already received the Spirit whose presence in us is proclaimed ritually in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. So we do not pray to receive the Spirit, but rather, to grow more aware of the Spirit’s presence in our lives and to allow that Spirit to grow within us, gradually re-shaping our minds and hearts in the image of Jesus.

So, today we are also celebrating the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit in our own lives.

Pentecost brings to a close the fifty days of the Church’s Easter celebrations. Soon we will begin Ordinary (Ordered) Time again. So, our feast today helps us understand that we take the Holy Spirit with us into the ordinary events and tasks of each day. That is how we allow the sacred to touch, heal and transform us and the world around us.

The first reading is St Luke’s account of the first experience of the Holy Spirit by the disciples. The Spirit so unites the disciples that they speak with one voice, in one language of faith and love.

In the second reading from the Letter to the Corinthians St Paul says that the Spirit brings a variety of gifts and all gifts are meant to build up the body of Christ. He uses the analogy of the human body to talk about the new body of Christ formed by those who hear the Spirit. This Spirit brings unity in diversity.

The Holy Spirit keeps us in the deep communion of love with God and Christ. The spiritual search is for the heart of God within our own. When we enter into relationship with Christ through the Spirit, the gifts begin to flow more abundantly. The Spirit is the source of reconciliation with ourselves and with each other. Reconciliation is essential if we are to ‘hold and guard’ each other.

The Spirit brings gifts of wisdom, courage, understanding, right judgement, knowledge, reverence, wonder and awe in God’s presence. May we be graced by them all as we discern and decide how we can best work together to build up each other and to let God’s love be seen at work in each of us.