

**May 23, 2021**

## **Pentecost**

*There are two Gospel texts for the Feast of Pentecost. The first, John 7:37-39, is for the Vigil Mass, and John 20:19-23 is for Sunday Masses during the day.*

### **John 7:37-39** (For the Vigil Mass)

On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.'" He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

### **Background**

This reading is especially appropriate because Pentecost is the last day of the Easter Season. In the early church, this was the day when those who could not be baptized during the Easter Vigil were baptized. Baptisms were not celebrated throughout the year because the importance of joining a community was an essential part of the early Christian understanding of baptism.

This Gospel text is very short. The feast that is referred to in the first verse is the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. It was the third and the most favored festival that Jewish men were compelled to attend during the year. During the feast, simple structures were built that reminded the people of their dwellings during their sojourn in the desert. The roof was typically covered with branches that would block the sun during the day but could be removed so that one could see the stars at night. The feast was celebrated when most of the harvest had been gathered. Each night the people gathered around an altar waving palm branches, and the priest poured water that was brought from the pool of Siloam, thanking God both for the rain that produced the harvest and the water that flowed from the rock into the desert. It was on the last day of this festival that Jesus stood and declared that he was the living water, and invited all to come to him.

### **Reflection Questions**

1. Do recall a time(s) when your awareness of creation was particularly meaningful for you?
2. Have there been times when you were thirsty for water, for companionship, or for meaning?
3. How does creation and the events of nature influence your understanding of how God is present to you? Can you point to a particular recent experience?
4. What is your experience of coming to the last day of school, of a job, a summer camp, etc.?
5. What hopes do you bring to this day?
6. How is Jesus standing up before you saying, "Let anyone who thirsts, come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says; 'Rivers of living water will flow from him'"?
7. What would you like to say to God about this feast of Pentecost, and about what God is saying to you, and how you would like to respond?

### **John 20:19-23** (For the Feast)

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose



sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

### **Background**

The second Gospel text for Pentecost is also from John's Gospel. The text presents a different kind of experience of the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples than is found in the Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11 (the first reading for Masses during the day). Even though the disciples have gathered in fear, they are sent out just as the Father sent Jesus himself. They have real reason to fear that those who arrested Jesus and crucified him may be plotting against them, too. However, the presence of the risen Lord is not impeded by a locked door, or their fears. The crucified Jesus stands in their midst and greets them with peace. This greeting of peace is also a prayer for health, prosperity, and all good that comes with the end times. Jesus breathes on them the Holy Spirit--an action that mirrors God breathing life into Adam in Genesis.

The disciples receive the power to both bind and forgive sins, an expression that names the two extremes but is intended to communicate the full range of power between the two extremes. In John's Gospel, sin is defined as the refusal to accept Jesus and his teaching. By asking the disciples to be agents of forgiveness, Jesus is commissioning them to be agents to reach out those who have rejected Jesus and his teachings. The text seems to use the energy that is present when two opposites are brought together to describe the new energy that is released by God upon the disciples.

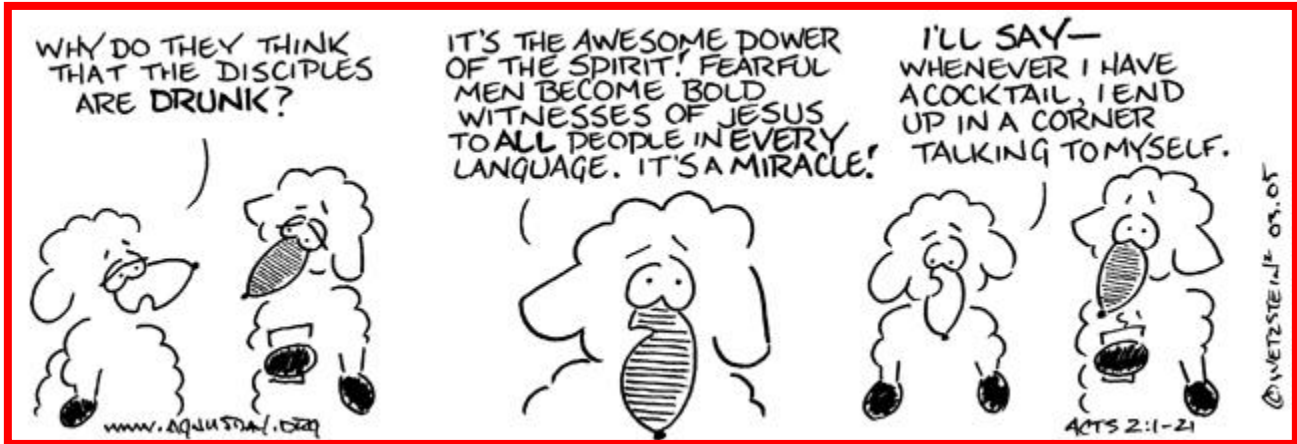
The modern reader may associate the forgiving of sins with the Sacrament of Reconciliation. However, in the early Church, forgiveness of sin was associated with Baptism. The Reconciliation that Jesus is commissioning the disciples to be about is much larger than the personal forgiveness of individual sins. It would seem to be about the kind of reconciliations that Jesus brought to the ten lepers when he told them to go show themselves to the priest so that they could be reinstated into the community, or when he spoke to the woman at the well and the whole community was transformed by her testimony. Forgiving in this sense seems to be about restoring the fullness of the relationship.

### **Reflection Questions**

1. Do you lock doors? Why?
2. Are there parts of your life that you keep locked away?
3. Do you know anyone who has been refused forgiveness by a parent or a significant other in their life? How does that affect them?
4. Where do you encounter your own fears? Are you grateful for some of your fears? Are you burdened by other fears?
5. Do you fear God?
6. In the text, the disciples had gathered in fear behind locked doors, and they were sent out empowered by God to act. Has God ever worked that way in your life?
7. Have you ever become aware of God standing in your midst? How did you recognize God's presence?
8. How do you experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in your own life? Have there been times when the Holy Spirit seemed to be present in a dramatic way, and times when the Spirit has been gently present to you--as gently as your own breath?

9. Can you talk with God now about your fears and the affect on your life, your experience of God's presence within wonders in your life, or perhaps how you have been empowered by God in your life?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM.  
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***This will mark the last Sunday Gospel for the season, this feature return when RCIA resumes in September 2021.***