

Pentecost. Year B
Lectio divina on Jn 15, 26-27; 16, 12-15

No sooner had the disciples recovered from the surprise of seeing Jesus alive than they had to learn to live without him. They rejoiced at seeing him risen, but they did not have the joy of his company. Jesus had come back to life, but not to life with his companions. The resurrection of Jesus meant that his disciples would remain alone, orphans in a hostile world. This sad and unexpected experience was mitigated by the conviction, intimately linked to his departure, that they could count on the Spirit who had raised Jesus from the dead. They could no longer accompany Jesus and learn from him, but they would be guided and taught by his Spirit. The Lord was no longer with them to defend them, but the Spirit would be their Advocate and teacher. It is from this sense of being orphans, and in this new company of the Spirit, that the Church was born, the community of those who believed in the Risen Lord. Today we celebrate the birthday of Christ's Church.

At that time: Jesus said to his disciples, ²⁶ "When the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; ²⁷ and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning. ¹² "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Read: understand what the text is saying, focussing on how it says it

In Jesus' long farewell discourse (Jn 13, 31-14, 31; 15,1-16,33) on the eve of the feast and at the end of the last supper, the evangelist has put together, in the form of a testament, a series of teachings given by Jesus. He knew that the hour had come for him to return to the Father and he loved his own, even to the very end (Jn 13, 1). If we want to understand this discourse of Jesus we need to keep in mind the narrative structure employed. Following a recognised Old Testament model, John presents Jesus who, on the night before he died, prepared those he was about to leave behind for the new situation they would have to face after his death and resurrection. They would remain alone, but they were not being abandoned. They were not left with nothing to do, nor without a Protector.

Among the tasks and the promises he left them, is the assurance that he would send "his" Spirit upon them. Indeed, Jesus announced the sending of his Spirit no fewer than five times: as the Advocate who would remain with the followers of Jesus (Jn 14,15-17); as the teacher who would remind them of all that Jesus had taught them and reveal it to them in greater depth (Jn 14,25-26); as the witness who would speak on behalf of Jesus (Jn15,26-27); as the one who takes the place of Jesus to show the world its error (Jn 16,4b-11); and as the Spirit who will make known who Jesus really is (Jn 16,12-15).

Even though our text is short, it is not homogeneous. Jesus first affirms the sending of a defender of the community (Jn 15, 26.27), who will be a witness to Jesus and will transform those who were his companions into witnesses. Jesus, who was sent by the Father, is the one who will send his disciples an Advocate – a sign of the power he has after his resurrection. They need this Advocate if they are to proclaim Jesus and to become his witnesses. Without this Advocate, the community would be incapable of understanding the Risen Lord, and incapable of being his witnesses. But the community also knows that without the Risen Lord, they would be unable to count on the Advocate as their powerful defender.

In the second part (Jn 16 12-15) the promise does not centre on the gift of the presence of the Spirit, but on one of the actions of the Spirit on behalf of the community. After the surprise of their meeting with the Risen Jesus, the first Christians found themselves in a world that was new to them, a world they did not understand. The promised Spirit would lead them to the truth, and make them understand all that He had heard and received from the Risen Lord. In this way, the Risen Jesus would be glorified. The glory of Christ is the confirmation that Christians had arrived at the truth.

Meditate: apply what the text says to life

The meeting of the Christian community with the world was something they could not avoid. The worst part was that the disciples had to face the world without having the Lord at their side. The persecution was, in fact, quick and cruel. The community was not prepared for that kind of tribulation. The synoptic gospels tell us how, on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus prepared his disciples for suffering and persecution (Mk 13,9-13; Mt 10,17-39; Lk 12,2-9). In John's gospel, Jesus spent the night before he died preparing them for his physical separation from them, and for the coming of the Spirit who would fill the void in their hearts. The disciples will suffer on account of his absence. They know that the Advocate, their defender, will be present among them, and they know that they will have to give witness in a world that does not want them. If Jesus does not leave them, the Spirit will not come. If the Spirit does not come, they will have no one to help them to remember Jesus and to bear witness to him.

Until the Lord returns triumphant, we Christians live with the same sense of abandonment the first disciples had after the resurrection of Jesus. We do not have him present with us. When we acknowledge that he has gone to the Father, we are also acknowledging that he is not with us. Because we do not enjoy his physical presence, we think that he does not share our tragedy since he does not live with us, and we find it difficult to remain faithful to him. This grieves us since we want to follow him. It makes our effort to remain faithful harder, and we are less sure of being able to follow him. We are just like that first generation of Christians who had to rebuild their lives and find their mission in the world without the physical support of the Master. He has left us alone, but no sooner was he gone from us than he sent us his Spirit, the divine breath that guided his life on this earth and the divine power that set him free from the tomb. His absence may pain us but we cannot complain of being left alone. We have his Spirit, our Defender, the great Comforter and Consoler.

But the Spirit of Jesus does not come only to console us by helping us to overcome the absence of Jesus. He is not simply a remedy for our nostalgia. Jesus sent this Advocate and Defender from the Father (Jn 15, 26), as he promised three times, with a mission to fulfil. His first task, and his principal way of defending the community, is to bear witness to Jesus in the community. The community, therefore, is the place in which the Spirit sent by the Risen Lord imprints the memory of Jesus and makes him present by acting as his spokesperson. He speaks about the absent Lord and does not allow the community to forget him, because he has come as his witness to them. The community knows that it has him as its Advocate, the gift of the Risen Lord to them, and knows too that it also has the task of bearing witness to him. The Paraclete and the community have one and the same objective: to remember, understand, believe and listen to the Risen Lord. In the preaching of the community, it is the Spirit who encourages and sustains the defence of the Christian faith against the world. A Church that is afraid to speak about the Lord Jesus is a Church without his Spirit. A community that refuses to give witness lives in discouragement, unprotected, and alone. By the very fact of not having the task of proclaiming the gospel, the community is missing the presence of the Spirit. If the community does not have the courage to proclaim Jesus, it will not enjoy the consolation of his Spirit. A community or a believer that does not bear witness to Jesus as Lord, cannot be of the spirit, because it was to bear witness to him that Jesus sent his Spirit.

In the community preaching, therefore, the testimony of the disciples is joined to that of the Spirit (Jn 15, 27), for the community and the Spirit have been companions from the beginning. When an evangelizer speaks, he has the Lord's Spirit in his heart: in the words of St Augustine, "He with his inspiration, and you with the sound of your voice." The evangelizer lives to make Jesus Christ known, because he has the Spirit who dwells in his heart. Since the Spirit is a gift of God freely given, there is no escape from the task of evangelizing. It is an obligation that must be fulfilled. We did not receive the Spirit by our own efforts, but we must make every effort to preserve it. We cannot live in the company of Jesus who is now risen, but we can enjoy his Spirit, provided we have the world as the goal of our evangelization.

After he spoke about the crisis that his absence would bring, Jesus mentioned another function of the Spirit - the Paraclete will be a teacher, guiding the disciples to the truth. It is significant that in John, Jesus does not appoint a teaching authority within the community, nor does he identify the ones in charge. The community, however, will have the Spirit of truth. His task will be to take the Word of God as both point of departure and point of arrival. Although he spoke of all that he had heard from the Father (Jn 15, 15), Jesus wanted to make known more than what he had revealed. The Spirit will make up for what was missing (Jn 16, 12) through his role as guide of the community, an office that belongs only to God (Exod 13,17; Num 24,8). The Spirit does not concur with Jesus, nor does he replace Jesus - he completes what Jesus taught, leading to a fuller understanding (Jn 14,26). He will not teach anything new but he will make clearer what has already been said.

Speak, listen and proclaim are the three verbs that explain the action of the Spirit. His action is analogous to that of the Son. He will speak of what he has heard and proclaim what is to come. To understand Jesus Christ, and to capture the real significance of his words and

grasp the ultimate meaning of his life is not given to everyone. It is a gift that the Risen Lord grants to those to whom he sends his Spirit. The desire to know Jesus intimately implies a desire to be possessed by his Spirit. Only those in whom the Spirit dwells can know him. The best news of all is that possessing the Spirit is a grace granted to those who bear witness to Jesus. Why, then, do we neglect the task of evangelization, since it means that we are depriving ourselves of the Spirit of Jesus?

The coming of the Spirit is not the end of the story. It is a new stage that comes between Jesus' Ascension and his definitive return. In the meantime, the community is guaranteed a correct understanding of life, because it is guided by the Paraclete who continues and expands and deepens the teaching of Jesus. Neither the community nor the Spirit is the origin of revelation, but the two of them, together, preserve it and perpetuate it. The Christian community and the Spirit of Jesus have the same goal in this world – to keep alive the memory of the Risen Jesus, making up for his absence by their memory and nostalgia. Anyone who lives to keep alive the memory of Jesus in today's world, knows that this is the gift of the Risen Lord that makes him a 'companion' of the Spirit!

In this way the Spirit will glorify the Son, as the Son has glorified the Father (Jn 16, 14). The glory of the Son is that the community be recognised by the Father. All that the Father has is given to the Son. Nothing of what the Father has is withheld from the Son. This is not only a matter of words, nor just of knowing, but of life that is shared. Everything the Son has belongs to the Father, and all that the Spirit communicates belongs to the Son. The Spirit receives and knows the community, and the community is proof of the Spirit. Knowing that he has received the Spirit of Jesus should make the Christian confident in himself and sure of the final victory over evil.

