

May 31st, 2020 – Pentecost Sunday - John 20.19-23

Imagine that you are setting out on a new venture, creating a new business, for example. As part of your preparation you recruit a number of people who you think will make good workers for you, workers who will learn the business and after a while will be experienced enough for you to take time for yourself, do some traveling while being able to get updates on your business. Not a big challenge to do that as we are learning. However, things do not go as smoothly as you hoped; you encounter a major crisis, and when you need support the most the people you choose, and depended on, all abandoned you, and you even learn that one of them was actually in on the problem that caused your project to fail. You, however, are resilient and you decide to have another go at it. Would you turn to those same people to help you with your new venture? You wouldn't? Neither would I! They would be the very last people I would turn to.

Now put ourselves in the place of those people who deserted their leader; we are one of them, and one day we are walking down the street and see our leader coming toward us? What would we think? It is not very likely that I would think, oh, how wonderful. I can't wait to meet him! Most likely, I would look for a side street or an open door to slink into while hoping that he hadn't been see. That is basically the picture we have in our readings today except the disciples had no means of escape, no time to get away.

It has been only about fifty-two hours since Jesus was taken from the cross and was buried. His disciples are gathered feeling guilty, scared, probably wondering if they are to be next and suddenly there is their dead leader standing in the room with them, suddenly just there; he didn't even open the door, which was locked. What thoughts must have entered their



minds: shame, guilt, and I expect fear at what Jesus might say? Remember he used some pretty harsh words to describe those who stubbornly refused to accept him. But not now- instead, *Peace be with you*. No mention, no reminder of their betrayal; no criticism of their past behavior. Simply, *Peace be with you*. This is certainly something new, something radical. And then again, *peace be with you*. *As the Father has sent me, so I send you*. He is picking up where he left off before his death. The project is not dead just as he is not dead. The dream lives on, but now it will live on through the witness given by his followers. He does not leave them in their state of shame and brokenness. They will be the ones to bring the good news to the world, to us. But they still lack something. After all, they are still the same people who deserted him previously, but now, because of their very brokenness, they are ready for more. They are ready because they have already demonstrated and come to know they are weak human beings. On their own they are powerless to withstand the forces Jesus is sending them out to meet and to conquer in his name. They will need his strength, and his singleness of purpose to fulfill the mission he is entrusting to them.

And so he takes a further step. *He breathed on them and said to them, 'receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them: if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'* He has reassured them that they are not to be

bound or their past and now he to share reality, that with the they will do the power not their



restricted by mistakes, wants them that same experience, world; but this through of his Spirit, own; and it

is only through the power of his Spirit that they, and we, are able to do so. On their own, on our own, they and we are powerless. It is important to note that the gift of the Holy Spirit is not given them, or us, for themselves, or we for ourselves. As St. Paul wrote to the faithful in Corinth, *to each is given the manifestation of*

the Spirit for the common good. 'The common good' – in short, we live for others, for the good of the whole society, wherever we find ourselves. As Paul also points out, God equips us for this task by the various *gifts* we receive. These *gifts* we use in a *variety of services* and within each *service* there is a *variety of activities*, all meant to be used for the common good. There is no shortage of opportunity.

Now the Spirit does help us be better people, just as Jesus calls us to be people living in his image. But we are in that image so that we can reach out to others – the poor, the sick, the lonely, the imprisoned, the hospitalized, those suffering the effect of the pandemic – everyone. So on this Pentecost Sunday we give thanks to Jesus and his Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit and we pray that, through the power and activity of the Spirit, we will become what we receive, the Body of Jesus Christ.

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