

Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of June, 2019

by Terry A . Modica



Ascension Sunday (or Thursday)

June 2 (or May 30), 2019

Read:

Acts 1:1-11

Ps 47:2-3,6-9

Ephesians 1:17-23 or

Hebrews 9:24-28;10:19-23

Luke 24:46-53



Reflect:

Why did Jesus ascend to heaven? Imagine how readily people would have converted if he had resumed his public ministry after his resurrection. Even the Pharisees who had seen him die would have fallen at his feet in repentance.

However, God's salvation plan for the world was much bigger than that. While Jesus walked the earth, he was but one human. Afterward, by giving himself in the Eucharist to his disciples, he became every human who takes this gift seriously. When we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, we unite ourselves to his mission.

As we see in today's Gospel reading, before he ascended to heaven, Jesus commissioned every disciple -- including you -- for this task. "Commission" means "with the same mission, working together. This commissioning rite is repeated at the end of every Mass, when the Jesus, through the priest, sends us forth to love and serve the Lord to make a difference in the world..

Humanly we are quite inadequate to change the world, so Jesus gave us his Holy Spirit. By uniting our spirit to his Spirit and then relying on God in every situation, adequacy is not the question. It's willingness. Are we willing to put time and effort and spiritual growth into being Christ's hands and feet and voice for the world?

Because Jesus ascended to heaven, he has no hands but our hands, and he has no voice but our voice. Are you unhappy about the evils that exist in this world? God has great plans to bring his kingdom into these situations. Are you concerned about the abuses you

see? Immorality on television? Injustices in your workplace? Divisions in your parish or hurtful behavior in your leaders? Jesus is far more disturbed by these evils than you are. And he has a plan. What do you think your part in it could be as you work with him and let *him* work through *you*.

Ever since Jesus ascended into heaven and sent his Holy Spirit to earth, God has chosen to minister to the world through us, first in our homes, then extending his love into our parishes and beyond.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † What thresholds or new beginnings are you facing?
- † How are these opportunities for the continuation of the ministry of Jesus?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † In what ways are you doing the works of Jesus?
- † Which parish ministries could use your gifts and talents?
- † How do you rely on the Holy Spirit to get it done?

Lord Jesus, fill me with the presence of Your Holy Spirit and with the gifts You want me to use. Show me when and how to use these charisms. And help me to overcome my pride and fears and any other sins that are holding me back from the works that You are calling me to do. I want to be Your hands, Your feet, and Your voice, Lord Jesus. Amen!

Comments:

Pentecost Sunday

June 9, 2019

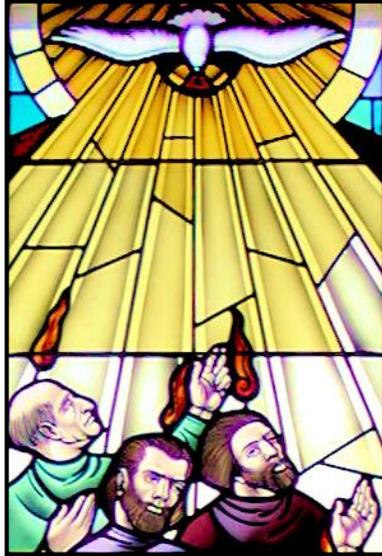
Read:

Acts 2:1-11

Ps 104:1, 24, 29-31, 34

1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

John 20:19-23



Reflect:

John 20:19-23 is one of two possible Gospel readings for Pentecost Sunday. In it, Jesus says "peace be with you" twice. First, he gives his disciples the gift of peace so that they can take their focus off of their worries to look at him and recognize him standing in their midst.

Then he says it again while giving them the vocation of continuing the mission that he had started. This time, "peace be with you" is to be the fruit of a life lived in the Holy Spirit while serving God for the sake of the world.

It's one thing to feel peaceful because we know that Jesus is with us. It's quite a challenge, though, to feel peaceful when telling others about Jesus, for we feel inadequate and overwhelmed, and we're afraid of being persecuted and rejected. That's why he gave us his Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit gives us whatever we need for doing the work that the Father asks of us, and thus we are not really inadequate nor does God fail to comfort us when people reject us.

One of the fruits of partnering with Jesus in the power of his Spirit is an inner peace that does not depend on what happens, nor on what others do or don't do to us, nor on how they respond to the Good News that we share with them. Peace is the result of being alive in the Spirit. Peace is the Spirit's activity within us.

At the end of this Gospel passage, Jesus gives the Apostles (the first Catholic priests) the authority to forgive sins as surrogates of his divine presence. He is

instituting the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which provides to us Jesus himself in the form of the human priest.

The same forgiving power of the Spirit enables all of us to experience peace in a sinful, tumultuous world. Even when forgiving is most difficult, in the Spirit of Christ we can do it. We can forgive those who hurt us, even if they never repent. And this is what restores our peace.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What is causing you to feel unpeaceful?

† Whom do you need to forgive in those situations? If you've forgiven everyone and you still lack peace, do you need to forgive yourself? Or God? Consider going to a spiritual director or counselor for help in finding all the peace that Jesus wants you to have.

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Give an example of how peace is a fruit of life in the Holy Spirit.

† What other fruits come from depending upon God and partnering with his Spirit?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Holy Trinity Sunday

June 16, 2019

Read:

Proverbs 8:22-31

Ps 8:4-9 (with 2a)

Rom 5:1-5

John 16:12-15

Reflect:

What don't you know that you hope God will reveal to you? What have you been asking Jesus to tell you that is still unanswered? What teaching of the Church don't you understand or agree with? In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus explains that there is more he'd like to tell us but we can't handle it yet.

Why aren't we ready for it? Because we have to first let the Holy Spirit prepare us. We have to let God transform something within us, and until we surrender to that process, the truth is more of a burden than a blessing, which we readily reject.

Everything that Jesus said and did came from the Father through the Holy Spirit. God gave us that same Spirit, that same Wisdom, that same Truth, but the gift is useless unless we submit to the Spirit's purifying activity.

Of the Trinity, it's the Father who forgives sins. It's Jesus who delivers the forgiveness. And it's the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us and empowers us to go and sin no more.

In the confessional, the priest is the presence of Jesus and the whole Body of Christ (the Church). Absolution is an action of his Holy Spirit, but it's more than just the removal of guilt; it replaces the sinful vice with the virtue that will help us avoid that vice in the future.

The Sacrament of Confession is a direct contact with the Holy Trinity who embraces our repentance and transforms us to increase our holiness. To receive this grace, we only have to be open to it and interested in cooperating with God. Humility is necessary to be teachable and transformable.



The unanswered questions in our lives become personal revelations when we earnestly seek to do the Father's will in unity with Jesus while growing in holiness through the in-dwelling presence of his Holy Spirit.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Write a list of questions you have for Jesus. What do you have trouble understanding?

† After making the list, ask the Holy Spirit to become your Teacher. Ask Jesus to help you become teachable.

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What gift of the Holy Spirit do you find most helpful in guiding you through life's difficulties?

† How does it help you to figure out and/or do the Father's will?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Holy Body and Blood of Christ

June 23, 2019

Read:
Genesis 14:18-20
Ps 110:1-4
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
Luke 9:11b-17



Reflect:

"Love is like five loaves and two fish, always too little until you start giving it away." This is the message inscribed at a shrine near the northern end of the Sea of Galilee, built where Jesus multiplied a small amount of food to provide for the needs of everyone in the large crowd who had come to see him.

In front of the altar is a Byzantine mosaic of the loaves and fish, dating about 480 A.D. It's next to the rock upon which Jesus blessed the food. However, in the mosaic you can see only four loaves, not five. Why?

The fifth loaf is the bread of the Eucharist in which Jesus comes to us in Communion at every Mass.

The Eucharist is more than the True Presence of Jesus. It's more than a communion with the Body of Christ that's become the whole Church community. It's a miracle of multiplication.

Whatever we lack from God, it comes to us in Jesus through the Holy Spirit, and when we participate in the Eucharistic celebration of Mass, we can (and should!) ask Jesus to multiply our insufficiencies into an abundance.

We can trust that he will give us all that we need, at the perfect time in whatever way we're able to receive it, albeit often through a growth process.

Do you have enough love in your life? Most of us would say no, because there is no one -- except God -- who is capable of giving us all the love that we need: No one, regardless of how close to us they are, regardless of how loyal and trustworthy, regardless of how close to Christ they are.

The Eucharist is our earthly, direct connection to all the perfect love of God. The reason we don't feel the fullness of that love is because we don't fully understand how to unite ourselves to the Eucharist. To receive the life-changing impact of the Eucharist fully, *be* the Eucharist fully. The Eucharist is love given in sacrifice for the sake of others. If you're not receiving enough love, give more love -- *be* the love you want to receive. *Be* Eucharist for others.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Is God's love sufficiently filling in the gaps where others don't love you enough? Take your needs to the Eucharist; ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to give more love instead of focusing on getting more, then ask Jesus to multiply the love that you give so that it's more than enough for your needs as well as the needs of others.

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Describe an experience of love being multiplied.

† How does this prove: "Love is like five loaves and two fish, always too little until you start giving it away"?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 30, 2019

Read:

1 Kings 19:16b, 19-21

Ps 16:1-2, 5, 7-11

Galatians 5:1, 13-18

Luke 9:51-62



Reflect:

How well do you handle rejection? This Sunday's Gospel reading shows us how the disciples reacted to rejection. They had entered a Samaritan village ahead of Jesus, as he had asked them to do, to gather an audience. But because the Samaritans had an anti-Jewish prejudice, they didn't want to listen to Jesus. Their hearts were closed to anything he might want to say. And so they missed an opportunity to experience the Savior of the world.

How do you feel when close-hearted people reject your efforts to bring Jesus to them? What do you feel like doing when someone refuses to listen to you? Or when you try to explain a teaching of the Church but they don't even want to try to understand?

The disciples who traveled with Jesus didn't like rejection any more than we do. Two of his closest friends, James and John, thought they would do Jesus a favor by asking, "Do you want us to zap them with a lightning bolt?"

Jesus had previously told them to deal with rejection by wiping the dirt from their sandals and walking away. Now he lived what he preached by walking away from these Samaritans. He didn't force his beliefs upon the villagers, even though they definitely needed the truths he could have taught them.

There's a lot we have to give up when we follow Jesus, including the grudges we like to hold and our desire to deal with rejection by retaliating. Why give others that kind of control over our moods? Wiping the dirt from our shoes means we get rid of the bad feelings that steal our joy.

At the end of this scripture, Jesus explains that following him is always a forward motion. We're always walking away from something -- away from rejection,

away from our unloving reactions to prejudice, away from the close-heartedness of those who are as yet unteachable -- and moving into the loving embrace of Christ.

To move forward, remember that the Holy Spirit is the only one who can prepare a heart to receive Jesus. When we try to bring someone to Jesus and fail, we're not really failing; we're planting seeds rather than harvesting the crop. Let the Holy Spirit finish the work while you move on to other fields.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Who is frustrating you because he/she is not willing to change?

† What can you do to "walk away" lovingly and to give yourself a break? (It might not be a literal departure.)

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Share the story of a time when someone rejected you because you spoke the truth. How did you feel about it? Did you walk away?

† How did (or might) the Holy Spirit work on that person's heart to prepare them to eventually accept the truth?

Comments/Prayer Requests: