

Friday – Seventh Week of Easter
May 29, 2020

Acts 25:13-21
Psalm 103
John 21:15-19

The Lectionary pattern from the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel of John throughout the 50 days of Easter have been and are a gift to us – particularly apt, as well, during these times when our world is so very sick.

In Acts, we have multiple descriptions of the visible and external work of the Holy Spirit in the words and actions of the disciples. So began the active life of the community that Jesus called into being with the gift of the Spirit.

In John (written through the lens of the Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost some 100 years later), we see the working of the Spirit and the living of Jesus' message in the internal lives of people. We heard about Nicodemus, the crowd fed on the hillside, those in the Upper Room and others who listened and believed and followed.

So, a gift.

These complementary readings revealing the Holy Spirit at work in history – externally, in action – and in Mystery – internally, in the hearts of believers.

We often use categories like-external/internal – describing our own life and ministry: active/contemplative, doing/being, work/prayer and so on. We can think about this a bit more today, especially as we approach the culmination of Easter in the Feast of Pentecost.

From Acts, we can ask: What did this coming of the Holy Spirit mean externally? It was the completion of Jesus' ministry on Earth. So, the fullness of the Paschal Mystery. It was what we call the birthday of the Church, a new community baptized in Spirit and in light. It was the beginning of the missionary activity of the disciples – no closed doors now, but a Work, the Word for all nations.

There is a new Law, a new Paschal Lamb, a new offering.

What did this event mean interiorly? What did it mean for these disciples to be filled with the Holy Spirit? It had to do with power and courage to continue the work of Jesus. It certainly had to do with forgiveness (they must have felt that very personally, having abandoned Jesus at his greatest hour). It had to do with public witness – to proclaim aloud their belief in Jesus as Lord. This had political implication, going against the highest powers of the Roman Emperor. To be filled with the Holy Spirit meant standing up for religious values in the face of social and political opposition, even to death. And

to be filled with the Holy Spirit had to do with acknowledging and using their gifts in ministry uniquely poured out on them, each one.

Paul, in today's reading, understood what it meant in all of these ways. It was his encounter with the Risen Jesus that radically decided his whole life.

What about the Gospel?

What was Jesus pressing Peter to say in this triple question about love? Was Jesus making a long reach into Peter's heart? Peter, so curved in on himself? Was Jesus searching for Peter to recognize their relationship as central? That only from there could he really live, that is, one with Jesus, no longer in exterior ways but interiorly? If that comes first (the one thing necessary) he will move into action: To feed, to tend ... Then Jesus' simple remark captures the point of this entire exchange: "Follow Me." Peter does, faithfully and completely, to the end.

These days, I have a lot of time on my hands. All the time in the world. I feel the sameness of each day with a certain loneliness and grief amidst this collective sorrow for our world.

Most days, I get outside and walk to our cemetery. I move slowly in and around our white markers, reading names and dates, recalling the lives of so many – their activity, achievements, hard work. Being in the thick of things.

But I also know the mystery of their lives that centered them and grounded them interiorly, so I stand among them and I ask for their Spirit. The same Spirit so wonderfully poured out and filling us, too. The Spirit that urges us to pray; that puts peace into our sometimes-chaotic hearts; that brings light into darkness; that gifts us with confidence, hope and energy to carry on. That Spirit that puts impossible virtues into us, like kindness, forgiveness, generosity. I pray to be moved beyond my limitations, fears, anxieties and regrets.

And with all our sisters, from ages past and in this age, to be called from deep within into action and "to speak God's Word with boldness and to risk deeds our hearts could never dream." (Article 16, IHM Constitutions)

Nancy Ayotte, IHM