

Reflection

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Sharon Holland, IHM

Today, we embark on another journey. Most recently, we journeyed through six weeks of Lent to arrive at the celebration of the Resurrection. For a week, we focused on Jesus' wonderful resurrection appearances in the Gospels. Now our eyes are set on Pentecost, May 31. Our face masks need not impede our vision on the journey, but they are a sign that this year is different.

The readings of the liturgy have taken on a new configuration. The Gospel texts today and in subsequent days are taken from John, recounting events from Jesus' earthly life. It seems a disjuncture from the days of Easter appearances. Here John engages us in the enigmatic dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again from above ... born anew of the Spirit. He is mystified by this, as well he might be. We can think of baptism and confirmation, but Nicodemus had no such references. This account from John 3 comes long before his reports of Easter appearances and the sending of the Spirit.

The first readings of the liturgy in these days continue from the Acts of the Apostles. These readings from Acts lead us on the journey of the fledgling Church guided by the power of the Spirit. While liturgically, we await Pentecost, still weeks away, in these accounts, the Spirit is already at work in the Community.

In today's text, after he and John have been released by the authorities, Peter is recounting their experience and praying. The author of Acts then tells us "... the place where they were gathered shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."

We need not limit the Spirit's appearance to a single event. As Jesus told Nicodemus, the Spirit, like the wind, blows where it will. And, as he reminded the fearful apostles, "The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name – he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you." (Jn. 14:26)

I realize that I do not think about the Spirit as often as could be helpful.

I am reminded of an incident from when I was teaching at Regina Mundi Institute in Rome. In a discussion, one sister volunteered that her foundress influenced Pope Leo XIII to write an encyclical on the Holy Spirit. I must admit that I was not fully convinced of this story.

It was true, however, as attested to in a book containing Leo XIII's encyclical, *Divinum illud Munus* (1897), and that of John Paul II, commemorating the centenary of Pope Leo's encyclical. Elena Guerra, foundress of the institute now known as Oblates of the Holy Spirit, had been greatly concerned that there was not sufficient awareness of the

Holy Spirit in the Church and that the celebration of Pentecost lacked proper solemnity. She repeatedly wrote letters to Pope Leo XIII and they bore fruit, first in providing for a more solemn celebration of Pentecost, and then in the encyclical.

Returning to consideration of our liturgical journeys, one of the constant themes about the Spirit, taken from John's Gospel, is that the Spirit will guide the disciples to all truth and remind them of all that Jesus taught.

We continue our journey, liturgically toward Pentecost and daily in communion, with a world struggling with the coronavirus. It is consoling and strengthening to think of the gifts the Spirit offers. Among the gifts of the Spirit we may ask wisdom, understanding, knowledge and fortitude for scientists, researchers and public officials as they seek cures and solutions.

Paul writes that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (Gal. 5:22-23). We may pray for these for those who are suffering and for those near to them; we may pray them also for all health care workers.

As we continue our daily journeys, well aware of the world's sufferings, we count on the strength of the Spirit as we offer mutual encouragement.

Going forward, I ask myself, what am I able to do to keep myself and others encouraged and in peace?