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The Holy Spirit as Paraclete

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The Holy Spirit as Paraclete

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Sixth Sunday of Easter

Sunday Readings for May 25, 2014 for Cycle A:

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17; Ps 66; 1 Pt 3:15-18; Jn 14:15-21

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS PARACLETE

Lawrence E. Frizzell

The liturgical calendar of the Church sets aside two blocks of time so that we can consider the Paschal Mystery of Jesus's Death-and-Resurrection in detail. Following the example of Moses and Elijah, Jesus spent forty days in intense prayer as he prepared for the public ministry of teaching and healing that would reach its climax in the witness of his death. Then St. Luke tells how, over a period of forty days, Jesus manifested himself to his disciples, speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). So we have eighty days to reflect upon the meaning of Jesus's suffering and death in relation to his resurrection and ascension. Central to Jesus's mission and its continuation is the gift of the Holy Spirit, whereby Christians share in the life of Jesus as risen Lord.

The vignettes of life in the infant Church provided in the first reading selected for these Sundays after Easter should encourage us to read the entire Acts of the Apostles. There St. Luke shows that the Church is born and grows under the impulse of the Spirit of God, just as Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit when Mary acknowledges her poverty and total dependence on God.

In the main, Jesus taught within the Jewish community, building on the long heritage of the guidance given by God to the House of Israel. Once the power of the Holy Spirit was "released" in the mystery of Jesus' resurrection (see Jn 7:37-39), the disciples moved resolutely to be his witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The persecution of the Church in Jerusalem became the occasion for Philip and others to carry the work and teaching of Jesus to Samaria and far beyond the confines of the Holy Land. People came to learn that healing was only an outward sign of the greater gift of new life in Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

At the Last Supper Jesus explained the various facets of the Spirit's role in the Church's life and that of her members. "I will ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you always, the Spirit of truth..." (Jn 14:16). The Greek word Paraclete means "one who speaks alongside of another"; it may be rendered by the words Advocate, Counsellor, Consoler and Monitor. To choose one or another term limits our appreciation of the rich dimensions of the presence of both Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. The phrase "another Paraclete" indicates that Jesus exercised the same functions during his earthly ministry.

At times we need a defender, someone who speaks on our behalf, whether in court or elsewhere. Thus the Holy Spirit defends the Church and her persecuted members. The second and related role is that of Counsellor, providing wisdom so that the Christian can bear effective witness to the Gospel. In time of persecution, "do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say... For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of the Father speaking through you" (Mt 10:20). In the trials of human life, people can indeed be uplifted by the kindness of neighbors, reaching out

as Jesus did. "Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Mt 5:4). On a deeper level, the Holy Spirit can transform our very emptiness into a prayer. "The Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness. When we do not know how to pray as we ought... the Spirit intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will" (Rom 8:26-27).

In the circumstances of persecution or suffering people know their limitations all too well. We accept help and appreciate friendship at such times. But when all seems to be going our way, do we stop to ask if this is God's way? The correction offered by a friend or neighbor may not be well received, unless the gifts of the Holy Spirit make us receptive. Admonition and warning by the subtle and persistent nudging of the Holy Spirit bring an awareness that selfish ways lead to atrophy and death. In every season, we need to be reminded that a much richer life is experienced by those who place God first in their daily existence. May the Paraclete lead us to the fullness of truth and understanding of the Father's will!