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The Holy Spirit as Paraclete

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The Holy Spirit as Paraclete

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Pentecost Sunday

Sunday Readings for May 31, 2009 for Cycle B:

Acts 2:1-11; Ps 104; 1 Cor 12:3-13; Jn 20:19-23

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS PARACLETE

Lawrence E. Frizzell

The Church calculates time very carefully, especially for the focus of the Liturgy on the Paschal Mystery of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit. St. John's Gospel stresses the unity of this mystery; from the Last Supper to the mission of the Holy Spirit the entire series of events constitute the "hour" for which Jesus came. However, St. Luke knew the importance of savoring these momentous events over a span of time. Only then can we have an opportunity to grasp the depth of the mystery. A period of forty days before Easter allows us to associate with Christ, who was tempted and suffered for our sins; then for forty days we try to learn about the Kingdom of God from the risen Lord (Acts 1:3). Finally, under the guidance of Mary, we prepare for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14).

When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church and that, consequently, those who believe might have access through Christ in the one Spirit to the Father (Vatican II, *The Church* #4).

During his earthly ministry Jesus was the great Paraclete, the one standing alongside (para-) of his followers to call out (*kaleo*) on their behalf. At the Last Supper he assured the Apostles: "I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you forever..." (Jn 14:16).

Like Jesus, the Holy Spirit is close to the Church and her members, fulfilling the functions of critic and admonisher, advocate and protector, counsellor and consoler. The term "Paraclete" involves all of these dimensions of instructing in the truth. We need to know the truth about ourselves and our weaknesses and to be assured that our sins have been forgiven. This is the first dimension of the Holy Spirit's mission and that of the Church. So when the risen Jesus brought his disciples his gift of peace he created them anew. "He breathed upon them", as God had breathed life into the first human being (see Gn 2:7). "Receive the Holy Spirit." This gift of new life enables them to be peacemakers in his name, especially bringing reconciliation to God and neighbor by the forgiveness of sins (see Jn 20:23).

When we should proclaim the truth of God's will, we must sense that God's Spirit of truth is defending us, inspiring us with words that should convince people of good will. The same Spirit defends those being persecuted for the sake of the Gospel.

In times of discouragement, the role of the Paraclete is to console and strengthen. When people are confused, their prayer should include moments of quiet listening for the counsel of the Holy

Spirit. When they wonder how to use their time and talents, they should be reminded that the Spirit would guide each person to work for the whole body of Christ.

When St. Luke described the fiftieth day after Easter, he drew attention to the Jewish feast of Weeks (seven weeks after Passover), for which pilgrims came from far and near. They were united to celebrate their faith in the God of Israel, and they were surprised to learn of new wonders that he had accomplished. The unifying power of the Holy Spirit helped the apostles to overcome the frustrating limitations of human language. May our generation be as receptive to the Spirit's sanctifying presence in the Church!