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The Holy Spirit Can Heal Us

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The Holy Spirit Can Heal Us

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Pentecost Sunday

May 19, 2013 Sunday Readings for Cycle C:

Acts 2:1-11; Ps 104:1, 24-34; 1 Cor 12:3-13; Jn 20:19-23

THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN HEAL US

Lawrence E. Frizzell

Over the centuries various cultures developed in relative isolation, with only a few major influences from the outside. In many cases people tended to be xenophobic, fearing or resenting the intrusion of strangers into their midst. This attitude is a factor in the racial and ethnic tensions that explode into violence in different parts of the world. At the same time, however, modern technology has assisted enormously in the ways whereby communication media have transcended the barriers between peoples and nations. "The Church sees the media (press, cinema, radio and television) as gifts of God which, in accordance with his providential design, unite people as brothers and sisters and so help them to cooperate with his plan for their salvation" (Pontifical Council for Social Communication, *Pastoral Instruction* of January 29, 1971, #2).

We know all too well that science and technology can be easily twisted to pernicious purposes, as Hitler and Goebbels demonstrated with radio in the 1930s. There is also a tendency to exploit even the arts of music and drama for the promotion of ideologies or attitudes contrary to the best interests of individuals and the world community. One would hope for greater maturity in the use of all the marvels discovered by human ingenuity, but it would be folly to base optimism on the principle that progress is inevitable. The Hegelian vision of history was devastated by two World Wars and the human tragedies of our century.

Is there a foundation for hope that people will come to respect the human dignity of *all* their neighbors and to accept the responsibilities flowing from the privilege of being creatures made in the divine image? The Feast of Pentecost celebrates the culmination of Christ's work for human salvation precisely as a spiritual reality communicated in ways that overcome human divisions and provincialism. St. Luke described the transition of a small community gathered for a novena after the Ascension (Acts 1:14) to a convocation (*ecclesia* or "Church") boldly proclaiming the Gospel.

To accomplish this, Christ sent the Holy Spirit from the Father to exercise inwardly his saving influence and to promote the spread of the Church... On the day of Pentecost the Church was displayed openly to the crowds and the spread of the Gospel among the nations through preaching was begun. Finally, on that day was overshadowed the union of all peoples in the catholicity of the faith by means of the Church of the New Covenant, a Church that speaks every language, understands and embraces all tongues in charity, and thus overcomes the dispersion of Babel (see Genesis

11:1-9). (Vatican Council II, *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* #4)

Pentecost is the 50th day after Passover and the harvest festival when devout Jews came in pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate God's gift of the Torah ("instruction" or Law) at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:1). From the time of the Babylonian Exile the prophets had emphasized that sins must be forgiven and the Torah be inscribed in the hearts of God's people (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). Ezekiel promised that God would cleanse the people and give them a new heart and a new spirit. "I will put *my* Spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees" (36:27). Did St. Luke and the early Church have such promises in mind? One of Luke's teachers did. "The law of the Spirit, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, has freed you from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2). The Gospel for Pentecost draws attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in applying the saving work of Jesus to each person who approaches the sacraments of Baptism and Penance. The Church's mission of reconciliation brings people into peace with God the Father, with their own conscience and with their neighbors. This quiet manifestation of the Holy Spirit as life-giver prepares the Church and her members to proclaim a message of hope to the world. Perhaps no age needed this gift of Christ's peace and wholeness (*shalom*) more urgently than our own! May the millions of Christians celebrating Pentecost show forth the healing and unifying gift of the Holy Spirit to our fragmented and torn world! Then fears should give way to the openness and love that create unity while allowing diversity as a sign of divine blessings.