

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Acts 2:1-21

^{2:1} When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." ¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

Commentary

It was on that holy ground that the Spirit fell on the day of Pentecost, some fifty days after the Resurrection. The disciples (a larger body than the eleven) were gathered in the Upper Room, and something extraordinary happened. It was one of the three main Jewish festivals at which all Jewish males were supposed to be present, there were many visitors in Jerusalem over all

the Mediterranean world (v. 9-11). The crowd thought the disciples were drunk, and Peter responded to the charge of drunkenness in two ways: 1) a reminder that wine shops were not even open at this time, and 2) a more serious appeal to the prophet Joel about the Spirit of God being poured out on all humanity, even on those who in many cultures were thought too insignificant for God to deal with. This was the power of God that would give them the calling, the gift, and the strength to witness to God both in their own communities and to the very center of the world—Rome itself.

Reflection

How do we experience the power of God's Spirit in the life of the church?

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

^{12:3b} No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. ¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Commentary

What does the Spirit do in the church? Paul gives a partial answer by talking about the Spirit's gifts to the church. There are varieties of abilities, ministries, and tasks, all of which are gifts of the Spirit. Gifts are for the sake of the church—they are for, as Paul, puts it, the building up of the church (not individuals, as we sometimes interpret spiritual gifts today). This is why, for instance, Paul insists that no one utter ecstatic speech unless there is someone to interpret. The church cannot be built up if a gift is displayed for one's own edification. Paul presents this metaphor of the body to remind his readers that, however different our gifts may be, we are all apart of the same body; and our gifts serve that community in different and also interdependent ways.

Reflection

What has been your experience of God bestowing spiritual gifts upon you? Is the experience warm and familiar? Mysterious and foreign? What is important about each of these gifts for the church today?

John 7:37-39

^{7:37} On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Commentary

This lection picks up the thirst-and-water theme of the woman at the well story we explored on the Third Sunday of Lent. It would be well and useful, perhaps, to revisit that in conjunction with today's study. The festival at the time of this scripture was Sukkoth (Tabernacles), which celebrated both God's act in history (the years of wandering in the dry, dusty desert) and God's act in the present (thanksgiving for the recent harvest). In Jesus' day, it was an eight-day celebration. Water was brought back to the Temple and poured out on the altar as an offering. This act was a prayer for rain and for the promise of good harvest the following year. It was also a reminder of the water that had flowed out of the rock in the wilderness (Exodus 17) when people had complained of thirst. Jesus looked around at the water rituals and invited all who are truly thirsty to come to him for "living water." Some may be familiar with the difference between rainwater collected in a cistern and fresh water coming from a flowing well—the second of the two being fresh and satisfying. Jesus promised this living water through the gift of the Spirit who was to come.

Reflection

What is the thirst for living water? How has that thirst become real at times in your life, and how has it changed you?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

^{104:24} O LORD, how manifold are your works!
**In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.**

²⁵ Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,

living things both small and great.

²⁶ There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

²⁷ **These all look to you,
to give them their food in due season;**

²⁸ when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

³⁰ When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹ May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works—

³² **who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.**

³³ I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the LORD.

^{35b} Bless the LORD, O my soul.
Praise the LORD!

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**