

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Pentecost Sunday

Every year we recall the dramatic coming of the Holy Spirit to the scared and worried followers of Jesus. That was their “break-out” moment. They opened the doors and announced to everyone that they believed that Jesus had risen from the dead, and that a new world had been designed by God.

Pentecost signaled the beginning of their ministry as disciples of Jesus. He was in charge until then, and now it was their turn to walk and talk like Jesus. They were inspired and literally spirited by God. The comparison to tongues of fire indicated that they were “on fire” with enthusiasm and love of God for humanity’s sake.

It was time to get busy, to step out in faith and to tell of the wondrous deeds that God had done in and through Christ Jesus. They could confirm that Jesus was now risen and alive and present in them—and in all Christians from that time into the future. It was *not* business as usual. Everything had changed.

A Gospel Word for the Home

John 20:19-23

Are you surprised to learn that there are two, yes, two Pentecostal events in the New Testament? The event most commonly referred to happened some fifty days after Easter. The other one happened on Easter night. That’s the one described in today’s Gospel reading. It’s toned down some, not nearly as dramatic as the one with the “fireworks.”

Both accounts underscore the arrival of God’s Spirit in the followers of Jesus. By implication, that includes all of us. The tone of today’s Gospel reading emphasizes the importance of forgiveness. This is the centerpiece of Jesus’ mission. He announced that our God was a God of mercy and forgiveness. While sin separates us from God, God does not let sin have the final word. Like the Prodigal Son’s father, God is bent on forgiving us, and bringing us back into a deep, loving relationship with him.

At this “other” Pentecost, the followers of Jesus are given the charge of bringing God’s forgiveness to others. Yes, it’s about the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but also about everyday forgiveness that we pray for when we recite the Our Father. We are to be forgiving persons who bring peace and harmony to each other. God so longs for us to enjoy this. All of us have sinned. All of us need God’s forgiveness. Being called to be imitators of God’s love, we are invited to extend forgiveness whenever we can, so that what is done in heaven will also be done on earth.

Parent Survival

When we fail to forgive another, we “hold” that person in sin. That’s at the heart of what is meant in the Gospel by either retaining or forgiving, tying up or freeing. To be honest, when we forgive another, whether it is a spouse, one of our children, neighbor, friend, or co-worker, who is the real winner in the act? Is it not ourselves?

If we fail to forgive, we are continuously burdened by feelings of ill will and hostile judgment toward that person. We may even harbor a desire for revenge. It can get really messy. It’s like a negative force that restricts us from being deeply happy and grateful. It ties us down. In being invited to forgive, we are not just asked to do something for another, but also for ourselves.

Car or Meal Talk

Play a forgiveness game. Take turns naming something someone did that you felt was wrong, harmful, or unpleasant. Then forgive that person. We know that real forgiveness may take more than just a word of forgiveness, but the process starts with a single word. Try it.

One-Line Prayer

Spirit of God: We know we are not always our best. We thank you for loving and being with us even when we’re not our best. Amen.