

Whitsunday

I take as my text today, from St. John's Gospel:

If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of Truth....

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

Today, we celebrate one of the most important events in the life of the **Church** — its awakening, its birth brought about through the operation of the **Holy Spirit**.

The Gospel passage that we just read is one of the most phenomenal passages in **Scripture**. In it, Jesus clearly shows us the **Trinity**, and the relationship of each to the other. We see in this passage from John the inseparableness of love and obedience, and the promise of peace and understanding and strength.

We are given insight into love as more than a feeling, or emotion, or a passion; indeed, John reveals to us love as the fulfilling of commitment, of responsibility, of obedience.

We human beings, unlike other creatures, are endowed with reason. We are rational beings with souls; thus, we cannot escape the traits that come with this gift from God, traits that define us as human beings. In other words, we have been endowed with emotions or feelings and something else — **Free Will** to use these emotions or feelings for good or for evil.

This divine gift of reason and the freedom to express it makes us human and sets us apart in the world.

Perhaps of all the traits or emotions with which we have been endowed is love. St. Paul certainly has placed it at the pinnacle.

Love has many forms from a self-centered focus to a divineness, a divineness which, despite our humanness, we can embrace when we come to understand it more fully in the sense of the relationship within the **Holy Trinity**, especially of God to his Son, they to us, and we to them; and even more, in the aspect of obedience, for, in obedience, we find the maturation of that loving relationship as creatures of God.

Jesus, by becoming one of us through the **Incarnation**, embodied the full expression of love, both in its humanness, as well as its divineness.

The fundamental precept of Christianity, thus, is love, emphasized by our Lord throughout His Ministry; demonstrated in the lives of the Apostles and Saints; and so well expressed and defined by St. Paul in the 13th Chapter of his First Letter to the Corinthians.

So, today, with the **Feast of Pentecost**, we celebrate the coming into the world of the **Holy Spirit**, whose coming breathed life into the **Church**. We celebrate the birthday of the **Church**. We celebrate the fulfillment of the promises Jesus made to His Apostles before He offered Himself up on the **Cross**.

When we pause to consider the words of St. Luke in the Epistle lesson, we can see what a momentous day this would be in the Apostles' lives as they bore witness to the birth of the Church, God breathing life into the **Body of Christ**, as His **Church** would be known, and setting into motion a movement that would change mankind and the world forever. In the words of St. Luke from the Acts of the Apostles:

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Ghost...

Here was fulfilled the promise that Jesus had made:

I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever ...

But Who was this **Comforter**?

Though the translation into English is **Comforter**, from the Greek *parakletos*, it really means *someone who is called in*. However, in the context of John's usage, a truer meaning is perhaps **advocate**, or, even better, *One who would supply Christ's own place in His absence*. That is to say, the Holy Spirit is Christ's Representative on earth, carrying on our Lord's work.

But truly, the **Holy Spirit** is more than that, for if Jesus had remained in the world, He would have been limited by His physical presence, whereas the **Holy Spirit** is not limited.

The **Holy Spirit** entered the world to perfect the work of Christ, to execute it by applying it to the hearts of men.

He would teach the Apostles all things needed for them to understand in defining the **Apostolic Office**, in particular those things they were not prepared to hear, or could not understand, all those things our Lord imparted to them when He was present with them.

The **Holy Spirit** would fulfill the promise that they would be inspired, and under His infallible guidance, they would organize the **Church**, and record the truths necessary for its edification.

Jesus told them that the **Holy Spirit** would *bring all things to your remembrance*. That is to say that the **Holy Spirit** would preside over their memories, so that they would recall all such truths and doctrine as was necessary and be reminded of the sayings of our Lord which might otherwise be forgotten. Not only bring to their remembrance, but also teach them the meaning of those things of which Jesus had spoken. The work of the **Holy Spirit** isn't confined to the Apostles and the **Apostolic Age**; His work is throughout all time, within the **Church**, and within each of us.

And the work of the **Holy Spirit** is the continuing love of Jesus Christ, strengthening each of us that we may respond to the Love of God in Christ by keeping His **Commandments**.

Indeed, our love of Christ, of God, is shown through obedience to His **Commandments**, as our Saviour showed forth His love of the Father by obedience, even unto death on the Cross.

This obedience to our Lord is not external for others to see but is written on the heart for God to see. It is the result of a true love of Christ that brings us into a union with the Father and the Son, in the bond of love.

Through our love of Christ, He will manifest or show Himself to us, and He and the Father will make their abode with us, that is, take up residence in our hearts, whereas we are temples, made ready by the **Holy Spirit** as a result of our love and obedience, fit temples for their abode.

In the words of St. Paul in his 1st Letter to the Corinthians, *Ye are the temple of the living God*, and, again, in the same Letter, *Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost*.

The passage for today ends with these words from our Lord:

*But that the world may know that I love the Father;
and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.*

It is not just that the Son loves the Father, but that He loves all that is the Father's, all that the Father commands, being One with the Father, with the greatest expression of that love being obedience to the Father, even unto **Death on the Cross**.

One of the endearing traits of St. John was his total embrace of the fullness of God's Love. This love, though easily misinterpreted as sentimentality, was, in reality, based on obedience to God. John epitomized the **Christian Love** that was expressed in the Law given by Christ: the commandment to love God, and to love your neighbor.

Our Lord's concern, as He approached the time when He would leave them, was not that the Apostles show their love for Him in grief, in tears, but to show their love in obedience to His **Commandments**.

And so it follows that, just as the Apostles showed their love for our Lord through obedience; and just as our Lord showed His love of God by obedience, so we must show our love of Christ by obedience to Him.

That first Christian **Pentecost** marked the beginning of the **New Covenant**, the old law being superseded by the new **Law of Love**.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He left behind His established **Church**, having instructed the Apostles that they were to wait for Him to send to them the **Holy Spirit**, which would open their minds to all the knowledge they had acquired.

Then, as promised, the **Holy Spirit** descended upon them, filling them, and breathing life into the **Body of Christ**, the **Church**.

We are the proof and living examples of the effect of the **Comforter** on each of the Apostles, and the fruit of their work, the **Gospel Harvest**.

We are proof that the **Holy Spirit** abides always in the **Church**.

As the Lord promised, so He has fulfilled that promise:

I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth.

The **Holy Spirit** dwells within each of us, giving clearness to our faith by illuminating our minds, giving zeal to our charity by shedding abroad in our hearts the love of God, and giving strength and power to all our graces.

The **Holy Spirit** enables us in our efforts to be obedient to, and to embrace the **Law of Love**.

The **Holy Spirit** is present when we are baptized, and we receive Him at the time of Confirmation during the *Laying-on of Hands*.

The **Holy Spirit** is ever present within the **Church**, His sphere of operation, and it is here, within this **Body of Christ**, where we should seek Him; indeed, while He is ever present in all creation, it is in the **Church** that we will finally find Him.