Solidarity as a Gift of the Spirit

A Reflection on Pentecost

Some witnesses thought they were drunk on wine, but, no it was the gift of tongues! The feast of Pentecost remembers this outpouring of the spirit on those gathered in one place. The force that animates and unifies this diverse group is the Holy Spirit. They are witness to the work of God in the diversity of human nations. This Spirit creates a new people, a people that manifests the characteristics of solidarity, a deep sense of interdependence, and mutual love and duty. Indeed, they have become, through the power of the Spirit, one human family. Through the Spirit, they share in the word, the spirit, and in the body of Christ regardless of their disparate tongues.

The Holy Spirit, Saint Paul assures us in the second reading for Pentecost, breaks down all the barriers that impede or destroy what is referred to in Catholic Social Teaching as the principle of solidarity: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (of Christ), whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons...” (I Cor. 12:13) Whatever divisions were prevalent in the human family prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit that impede living in solidarity with one another as one human family are eliminated. The awesome power of the Holy Spirit recognizes and enables solidarity.

In one of the optional second readings for Pentecost, Saint Paul enumerates the fruits of the Holy Spirit, the qualities to be incarnated in the human community that make for right relationship (the biblical definition of justice) and solidarity: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

Catholics believe that the Church, all the people of God, today continue to be animated by the same Holy Spirit that formed the first disciples of Jesus and guided their work. John assures us in his Gospel that “when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth.” This work of the Spirit can surely be perceived in the various social encyclicals that call us to cooperate in forming a “civilization animated by love” and advancing “the Christian ideal of a single family of peoples in solidarity and fraternity.”

Readings for Pentecost

Acts 2:1-11
Reading 1 for Pentecost Sunday

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, “Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.”

Notes

Questions for Discussion

1. In his book *Strength to Love*, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King states: “How often are our lives characterized by a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds!” How can we be deed anemic? Are we ourselves, or our community, more comfortable proclaiming the word than doing it? Why is it often more difficult to carry out deeds?

2. In Luke 4:18, Jesus proclaims in the synagogue at Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free…” What does this passage say about the work of the Spirit?

3. We often experience difference as a barrier to solidarity. In what ways can our different languages, styles, cultural habits, etc. be expressions of sharing in one human family?

4. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, #2) asserts: “In the present era of time the Church was constituted and, by the outpouring of the Spirit, was made manifest.” How is Catholic Social Teaching an “outpouring of the Spirit?”

Quotations from Catholic Social Teaching

Paul VI clearly understood that the social question had become worldwide and he grasped the interconnection between the impetus towards the unification of humanity and the Christian ideal of a single family of peoples in solidarity and fraternity. In the notion of development, understood in human and Christian terms, he identified the heart of the Christian social message, and he proposed Christian charity as the principal force at the service of development.

-- *Caritas in Veritate*, #13

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.

-- *Justice in the World*, #6

There are other obstacles to creation of a more just social order and to the development of world solidarity: nationalism and racism.

-- *Populorum Progressio*, #62

Today perhaps more than in the past, people are realizing that they are linked together by a common destiny, which is to be constructed together.…

-- *Solicitudo Rei Socialis*, #26

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the People of God.

Create in us a new heart, a heart that will be attentive to injustice and all that oppresses our brothers and sisters.

Open our minds so we can be guided by your spirit to discern the path we must follow in advancing justice and to act wisely while we are on pilgrimage.

Amen.