

# Pentecost

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How many times have we heard that love is all you need? Well, it is not true because truth is equally necessary. Love and truth are inseparable, and if the world today suffers from a deficit of love because it suffers a deficit of truth; truth defines love and authentic love expresses truth. In the context of today's celebration of Pentecost that means that the Holy Spirit is not about emotionalism and he does not dispense us from the hard work of thinking.

But wait a minute, someone might say: "Doesn't St. Paul tell us the way of love is the more excellent way, (cf. 1 Cor 12:31) that knowledge puffs up while love builds up? (cf. 1 Cor 8:1) Does he not write that *the love of God has been poured forth in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given us.*" (Rm 5:5)

We must, however, beware of reading a single passage out of context. Jesus himself does not call the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Love, but rather *the Spirit of Truth that proceeds from the Father.* (Jn 15:26) Further he tells us that the Holy Spirit will lead us to all truth. (cf. Jn 16:13)

This is important because in this day and age, this day of disunity and division and discord, we witness on a daily basis arguments about right and wrong that boil down in the end to mere assertion of opinion or feeling. Expressions such as, "Well, that is *my* opinion" or "Well, that is what *I* feel is right" are played as trump cards. In this context it has become all too easy to propose love as a solution, all too easy to say "love wins", but it is not so easy to say what the word 'love' even means any more. Indeed, more often than not it means nothing more than a vague sentiment or emotion, or worse a blind passion. That is not the love of God.

Now, if we consider the message that the multitude understood on the day of Pentecost, each in his own language, that message had to do with *the mighty acts of God.* What mighty acts? No doubt the acts of Jesus Christ, especially his death and resurrection, in accordance with Scripture. Those acts were surely expressive of the love of God because we well know that *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,* but those acts were no less real and therefore true.

It is true that God created the world; it is true that God sent his Son to die on the Cross and rise again from the dead in order to redeem us; it is true that this was the supreme expression of God's love for us; it is true that God, the Most Holy Trinity, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God in three persons, three persons in one God, is the God who is love. If none of this is true, then all the stuff about love is a mere pipe dream.

Now let us consider this same theme of truth and love in today's Gospel, this Gospel that reveals God's mercy in the forgiveness of sins, coming we could say like rays of light from the wounded side of Jesus Christ, Risen from the dead.

In today's Gospel we find the Apostles cowering in fear behind closed doors. Why? Because their Lord and Master, Jesus, had been crucified and they were afraid of suffering the same fate. Nevertheless, there was more to the matter than that; they were also fearful because they had behaved badly; they were fearful because they had abandoned Jesus; they were fearful because they had failed to stand in the truth.

After the Apostles had fled and left Jesus alone, though Jesus was never alone because his Father was always with him, (cf. Jn 16:32) Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate who asked him about his kingship. Jesus answered Pilate, saying, *You say that I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.* (Jn 18:37)

Above all Jesus testifies to the truth of his own person, for he is *the way, the truth, and the life*, and to the truth of God's plan of salvation. (Jn 14:6)

When the Apostles abandoned Jesus, they abandoned the truth, and abandoning the truth, they were left powerless and fearful in the face of the brute power of the Roman Empire. That is why they were cowering behind locked doors on the day of the Resurrection.

That failure to stand in the truth is also the reality of human history, from the time of the garden of Eden to this day. Sin always involves a lie, which rejects the truth of God and cuts the soul off from the life of God, the tree of life. Adam listened to the lie of the devil and so failed to stand in the truth. He then went and hid from God amid the trees of the garden. Since then human history has been marked by the failure to stand in the truth.

Now, in the story of the fall, God calling out to Adam asked, *Where are you?* He called Adam from hiding and exposed his sin. Nevertheless, he did not yet free him from sin, he only promised salvation to come. In the story of the resurrection that we have heard in today's Gospel, Jesus enters into the locked room where the Apostles are hid. He, the one they had let down, the one they had abandoned comes and stands in their midst. He, the one who would have every right to enter that room in wrath and condemnation, greets them saying, *Peace be with you.* With those words he forgave their sins and restored their lost dignity, he re-established them in the truth. This great act of God's love involved rescuing men from the devil's lie and restoring them to the truth and reality of God's life.

Then, as a matter of emphasis, Jesus showed them his hands and his side, as evidence of forgiveness, as though to say, "These wounds to which you betrayed me, have not conquered my love, but rather are signs now of my victory over death and sin."

Having forgiven the Apostles, and restoring them to the truth, he commissions them as messengers of his mercy, just as he was the messenger of his Father's mercy – *As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*

He then gives them the Holy Spirit, giving them the power to fulfill their mission by forgiving sins in God's name, a sacred power that to this day is exercised by priests in the confessional.

Often we have a rather individualistic and self-centered idea of the forgiveness of sins. We feel the burden of our sins, we are unhappy with ourselves, we have found that our life has fallen into disorder; when we receive God's forgiveness we feel that we have been given a new beginning, a fresh start. Then we see that fresh start as an opportunity to move ahead with the life that we want for ourselves. We fail to perceive that we have been re-established in the truth and so should take the opportunity of the fresh start to go forward, living in the truth.

The forgiveness of sins re-establishes us in the truth that was lost through sin and gives us the power to live in the truth. The forgiveness of sins re-establishes us in the truth of our baptismal grace, the grace that made us to be children of God; the forgiveness of sins re-establishes us in the truth of the Body of Christ. Further, it gives us the power to live a life in which thought, word, and deed form a coherent whole, a life that conforms to the reality of the Body of Christ, a life that has meaning and purpose, a life that has meaning and purpose precisely because it accepts the truth of reality, it accepts the will and plan of God for human life, and is integrated into the whole life of God's family, God's people, the Body of Christ.

In his 3<sup>rd</sup> letter, St. John writes, *nothing gives me greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.* (3 Jn 4)

St. John is also the one who stood by the side of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the foot of the Cross and witnessed the flow of blood and water that poured forth from Jesus' open heart; he then bore witness to the truth of what he saw, the truth of God's love and mercy. (cf. Jn 19:35)