

## Trinitarian *Com*-mission & Christian *Com*-union

### Second Sunday of Easter – 19 April 2020

Acts 2:42-47; 1 Pet 1:3-9; Jn 20:19-31

*“Peace! ... As the Father has sent me, so I send you ... Receive the Holy Spirit!”* (Jn)

Prologue: Today’s gospel passage contains the ‘Johannine Pentecost’ with the Crucified-Risen Lord commissioning his disciples for a ministry of reconciliation [binding and loosing]. Trinitarian Communion becomes a model for the Christian community. We can stress on the ‘*com*’ or ‘*cum*’—the ‘with’ aspect—since our Christian life, liturgy and work is always being done collaboratively ‘*with*’ the Trinitarian God.

### Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. Though the gospel passage is fairly long, it can be reflected upon in two parts: (a) The Risen Lord breaking into the room where the frightened disciples are gathered [without Thomas]; and, (b) The Risen Christ appearing a week later, evoking Thomas’ proclamation of faith. Since the former part (i.e., Jn 20:19-23) as well as the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles mention about the Holy Spirit and the influence of the Spirit in the daily life of the new Christian community, it might be opportune to reflect and speak on the first part of the gospel in greater detail. Looking backward, from the gospel passage of Easter Sunday (Jn 20:1-18), we know that Mary Magdalene, Peter and John have already visited the empty tomb and believe that Jesus is risen; i.e., he is neither dead nor earthbound. However, due to the resurrection being such an unprecedented event, the good news does not seep into the depths of their being. There is still confusion and fear, which keeps them “*locked*” up. But the Crucified-Risen Lord breaks in. “Peace be with you!” is the twice-repeated greeting of the Risen Christ (vv.19,21). Confusion is turned to belief; fear, to joy. “The disciples *rejoiced* when they saw the Lord” (v.20)—for he showed them his hands and his side—and now felt him near them, with them, and even ‘*in them*’ since his person was not bound by the physical laws of nature. Then, there is a Trinitarian ‘*com*-mission’: “*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.... Receive the Holy Spirit.*” Just as the Spirit of God blew over the dark, deep void to create the cosmos (Gen 1:2), so does Jesus blow the breath of the Spirit over his disciples, transforming them into a new creation, co-creators of a new church, co-workers in a new covenant. This is the Johannine Pentecost which climaxes with a ‘*com*-mission of reconciliation’. More of this later in point no. 3.
2. The Pentecost in the Johannine Tradition is paralleled with the Pentecost in the Lucan Tradition. Chapter two of the Acts—verses 42 to 47 which we read today—has a beautiful description not only of the Pentecost (vv.1-13), but also of Peter’s bold address to the crowds (vv.14-36) revealing his total transformation and fearlessness. This leads to the hearers being “cut to the heart” (v.37), converted and “three thousand of them being baptized” (v.41). Today’s passage tells us that these “new converts”—first fruits of the new Jesus movement—begin doing three things: [a] devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching; [b] broke bread at home and ate food with glad and generous hearts; and, [c] sold their possessions and distributed the proceeds to the most needy among them. One can easily remember these three activities in terms of 3 C’s: *creed, cult, conduct*. The apostles’ teaching was their *creed*. The ‘breaking of bread’ was the first form of the early Christian *cult*: Eucharist. The sharing of everything they possessed characterized their *conduct*,

which can truly be called 'holy communion'. This passage is often quoted as the ideal Christian community: i.e., they were children of Abba-Father, close followers of the Christ, Jesus, and bearing the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23).

3. Besides stressing the above three activities of the new Christian church—that are Abba-inspired, Christ-initiated and Spirit-impelled—one must be aware that the Christian *com-mission* comprises a 3-fold reconciliation. When Jesus says: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn 20:23), he is entrusting to His Church the ministry of reconciliation: to reconcile humankind with God, to one another, and to mother earth. Thus, whatever the Church is and does is Trinitarian, for God will never forsake us; rather, the Church as a whole and individual Christians, too, will always feel the presence and power of the Triune God in all they are, say, do: in their knowing [*creed*], loving devotion [*cult*] and self-sacrificial serving [*conduct*].

### **Linking the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading to the Trinitarian Theme and to Communion:**

Today's second reading is from the First Letter of Peter, the prime Apostle, who was martyred, crucified upside down, around the years 64-67 AD. Peter praises God, the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” for birthing a people “born anew to a living hope through the resurrection” (1 Pet 1:3). He commends them for their faithfulness, despite their sufferings, and exhorts them to hold fast to their legacy which is being tested “like gold in the fire” (v.7). He commends these Christian converts by saying: “Although you have not seen him [Jesus], you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (vv.8-9). Today, would Jesus pay us such compliments on our own ‘believing-without-seeing’ faith?

### **Three Current Concerns:**

*Covid-19 Creed:* The newborn Christian church and individual Christians were moulded by the “apostles’ teachings”. As bishop, priest, elder, teacher or parent, what teachings do I impart to those in my care? Often, Christians do not know more about God than what they learnt at Catechism or Confirmation classes. Specially during lockdown, how should I improve my knowledge—and teach others—about God and God’s working in our world, today?

*Covid-19 Cult:* Rather than “breaking of the bread” in common on Sundays in churches, today, everyone is locked up at home and ‘*seeing Mass*’ on TV or mobile phones. Are the faithful not “breaking bread in their homes”? How can our liturgical and sacramental practice be made more meaningful in times such as these? Can some para-liturgical, symbolic elements be introduced in prayer, keeping in mind the practice of the early Christian community?

*Covid-19 Conduct:* It is commendable that many Christians and Christian institutions, nationwide, are coming out in large numbers to feed the hungry, heal the sick and even offer their centres to house the homeless. What ‘*more*’ can we do in the true spirit of Jesus who exhorted us to love and serve Him in the hungry, thirsty, naked, imprisoned and so on?

*May we become increasingly aware of our:  
Trinitarian com-mission and Christic com-union!*

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