

Seventh Sunday of Easter (A), May 4, 2008

Readings: Acts 1:12-14; Ps 27:1, 4, 7-8; 1 Pt 4:13-18; Jn 17:1-11

Our Home in God; God's Home in Us

David Hollenbach, S.J.

Today's first reading gives us a picture of Jesus's disciples between the day of his Ascension and the great events of Pentecost. The first reading pictures the apostles gathered in Jerusalem along with Jesus's mother Mary and a number of other women who were Jesus's close followers. They are gathered in prayer, awaiting the fulfillment of Jesus's promise to give them the Holy Spirit. So this is a good opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the promise of the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to receive the Holy Spirit? John's gospel tells us that it means God will come to live within us, and that we can come to live in God.

A bit before the reading we heard from John's gospel this morning, Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to his followers after he has departed. He tells them they will receive divine help in the form of "another *paraclete*" who is the Holy Spirit. The Greek word *parakletos* literally means one called to stand beside me, to support me. In a legal context, *paraclete* refers to a defense attorney or "advocate"—one who speaks for me and defends me. In other words, the Holy Spirit is God on our side, defending us against unjust accusations. Or if we are guilty, the Holy Spirit defends by bringing forgiveness. This is the kind of advocate we want whether we are innocent or guilty. So it is right that *paraclete* is

also translated “comforter” or “consoler”—one who offers consolation in time of struggle, loss, or suffering. Thus a great hymn describes the Holy Spirit as father of the poor, who brings rest to laborers and solace to the tearful.

What is the source of this consolation? Jesus promise to send the Holy Spirit came in the midst of the passage from St. John’s gospel we read last week. As he faced his death, Jesus promised his disciples “I will not leave you orphans.” I will send you the Spirit, who will be your advocate or comforter. The Spirit will abide with you, and will be in you. Indeed, the Spirit is the life and love of Jesus himself, living with and in his followers. Even more radically, the presence of the Spirit will be the very reality of God dwelling with them and in them, enabling them to live with and in God. In Jesus words, “we will come to you and make our home with you.”

Think of this: the gift of the Spirit means that the great God who has created all that is and is greater than the widest expanse of all the universe will come near us, be with us, will live in us. The presence of the spirit is God making God’s own home in each of us—in you and me. Despite the fact that we believe that God is almighty and all powerful, we can trust God so totally that we can make our home with God. The dwelling of the Spirit of God within us means that God’s true home in us and our true home is in God.

Jesus proclamation that God's home is in us is an extraordinarily powerful image of the depth of God's love for us. Think of two people who are best friends. They are really most at home when they are with each other. Or think of two persons deeply in love with each other. They long to be with each other when they are apart, and only when they are together do they experience the rest that comes from being where they most want to be. Each of the lovers can truthfully say to the other: my home is in your heart.

This is the sort of love that we are invited into by the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. God's love for us is like the friendship that links best friends together. It brings the friends mutual support and joy. God's love for us is so total that we can be completely at home with God. God's love for us is so radical that Jesus proclaims that God wants to make God's own home with us. Jesus, his Father, and their Spirit will come to us and make their home with us.

This kind of love means that we can look to God as our advocate no matter what difficulties we might have gotten into. We can trust that God will be our comforter even in the midst of struggles, loss, or suffering. So as we remember that the Holy Spirit is promised to each one of us, we can pray:

Come Holy Ghost, Creator Blest,

And in our hearts take up Thy rest;

Come with Thy grace and heav'nly aid

To fill the hearts which Thou hast made.

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