



6th Sunday of Easter



Date: Sunday, May 17, 2020 | **Season:** Easter | **Year:** A

First Reading: Acts 8:5–8, 14–17

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 66:1–7, 16, 20 | **Response:** Psalm 66:1

Second Reading: 1 Peter 3:15–18

Gospel Acclamation: John 14:23

Gospel Reading: John 14:15–21

Preached at: the Jesuit Institute in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Before Jesus Ascends, he needs to explain to the apostles that they will not be left alone. That he will send his spirit to be with them.

In the first reading we see Philip fulfilling a prophecy of Jesus that the Good News would be preached in Samaria. Samaria was home to the Samaritans – the neighbours of the Jewish people who they thought were foreigners and heretics. Given their inherent opposition to each other, Philip is being very bold in entering ‘enemy territory’ to preach the Word of God. So it is interesting to see here the unity with which the message of Jesus Christ was received. They could not argue with the truth that was demonstrated before their very eyes, and there was much joy in that city as they were confirmed. Joy is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Can we recall the joy we felt at our confirmation? Or at some other time in our faith journey?

Peter teaches in the second reading that believers in Jesus must “always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope”. Peter imagines a situation of open hostility to the Gospel in which Christians are being made to suffer for doing good. In a way, it could describe our current world, where believers are often dismissed or derided. Phillip shared the truth with the Samaritans. Truth is another characteristic of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not lie. That is the preserve of the Evil Spirit, whom, among his many titles, is called the Prince of Lies. This Spirit of Truth is often seen in the gifts of Knowledge, understanding and wisdom. To be open to the Spirit means being open to the truth as it is revealed to us. This is never a static event, but a continuous deepening of understanding and learning. For if we are in relationship with

God, then God's desire to deepen that relationship with us will entail us having to be always open and alert to what God is doing in our lives. Give thanks for those moments of insight and understanding.

In today's Gospel Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit. He says "I will not leave you desolate... I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever." This Counsellor is the Holy Spirit, a gift from the Father and the Son to us so that we are never alone.

The Holy Spirit offers other gifts or signs of her presence: counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. When the Holy Spirit is present in our lives we see it in the fruits of: charity, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity. We know that when we lack these in our lives, when we are unkind, not at ease, impatient, jealous, angry, etc., we need only ask God for the grace to see His Spirit, and invite the Holy Spirit back into our lives. Sometimes this can be done by taking a moment to pray, or to say sorry. Sometimes one might need sacramental grace as well – but don't underestimate your own prayers. As I often share in the confessional, the evil spirit is constantly working against the Holy Spirit. Our choice as Christians is to learn to listen for and to the Holy Spirit. The fruits of the evil spirit are despair, a desire to compare, and to lie. We need to ground ourselves in the joy and truth of the Holy Spirit.

We cannot know the Spirit unless we can recognise the truth. The very idea of truth is under threat in our world. Our belief in God is based on something true. We cannot share that unless we are aware of that truth. One of the ways the Spirit works in the world is that it opens our eyes and allows us to see again – to see not only the truth of what is before us, but to see Christ, and Christ suffering in the poor. If ever we need to remind ourselves of the truth in our world, let us look at the poor. For they cannot hide behind airbrushed falsehoods. Their lives are real and we would be good not to forget both them, and the raw truthful challenge they present to us.

Finally, in many of our Catholic Schools, we celebrate Catholic Schools Week. So, to our learners and teachers who build the communities of love and support that we so desire in our catholic schools; but also to the parents who sit on parent bodies, governing boards, help at tuck-shops or do anything to help our catholic schools, and who a few weeks ago were having to be the teachers them-

selves as many of our Catholic schools adapted to offering lessons online... Thank you. In fact, we should say thank you to parents much more often in the Church – as they are the first catechists and educators of their children! But for what everyone does for the Catholic Schools, I want to say thank you.

Parents please encourage your children to actively decide to be friends with the lonely, to refuse to allow bullying to take place in school, and to stand up for the weak and the persecuted. And children, you don't need to wait to hear from your parents – in fact, very often the way you love, the way you are kind and generous, the way you respond to the Holy Spirit – with such spontaneity and simplicity and innocence, actually helps your parents to learn from you – or more accurately to re-learn what they have forgotten. And always find time to play. Because it is in relationship with each other where so many of these fruits, such as joy, peace, forgiveness and understanding are made visible and real to you.

Let's give thanks for the Holy Spirit in our lives, and in the lives of our children. Amen.

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