

## De Krijtberg, Pentecost, 23 May 2021. Acts 2: 1-11, Jn. 20: 19-23

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According to the Czech philosopher and theologian Tomas Halíc, the Second Vatican Council has brought a necessary rapprochement of the church with the modern world, but in practice it lacked an adequate focus on depth. He believes that the liberal sixties came through the windows of the church rather than the violent wind of a new Pentecost. He also quotes the theologian Karl Rahner, who noted that the Christian of the future will either be a mystic or will not be anymore. New ideas are not enough, a new spirit is needed. A new spirit: that's what we're celebrating today. Today's readings speak of the Holy Spirit coming upon the apostles and many others.

### **'Spirit' according to the Bible**

What does the Bible say about 'spirit'? In the beginning of Genesis we read: *darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters* (1:2). The Bible uses a word for 'spirit' that also means 'wind' and 'breath'. Wind is something mysterious, it comes from heaven and is invisible, but it does have an effect on earth. When God's creative breath passes over the wild and dead primeval flood, heaven and earth, light, plants and animals are created. Further we read: *God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being* (Gen. 2: 7). So God's spirit or breath refers to His creative power and to life.

The breath of the Spirit also refers to prophetic inspiration. This is for everyone. Through the prophet Joel God says: *I shall pour out my spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old people shall dream dreams, and your young people see visions. Even on the slaves, men and women, shall I pour out my spirit in those days* (3: 1-2). According to the prophet Ezekiel God says: *I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you...* (36: 26-27).

God's Spirit is especially associated with Jesus. When he was baptized by John in the Jordan, *the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove* (Lk 3:22). Inspired, guided and strengthened by God's Spirit, he went about (Lk. 4: 1.14.18, 10:21).

### **Holy Spirit in today's readings**

Jesus' disciples also received the Spirit. We heard in the Gospel reading how *the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were*, for fear of the worldly and spiritual rulers who had killed Jesus, for fear of the crowd, who had at first shouted 'hosanna', but who had been stirred later to shout 'crucify him'. They also had a bad conscience because they had abandoned Jesus, one of them had betrayed him, Peter had denied him. But suddenly Jesus was among them again, and the first thing they heard from him was not a reproach, but a wish for peace. No revenge, no retaliation, but forgiveness, reconciliation and peace. Jesus *breathed on them*, his breath floated over them, as God's spirit floated over the waters in the beginning of creation. Jesus blew over them as God breathed life into the nostrils of man formed of dust from the ground. Jesus spoke the words: *Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive*

*anyone's sins, they are forgiven.* The inspiration by the Spirit appears to be God's forgiveness. This inspiration implies at the same time the command to forgive others as well.

In the first reading too, from the Acts of the apostles, we heard how the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, symbolized by the *sound as of a violent wind* and by *tongues as of fire* resting on each of them. The effect of the Spirit is that they began to speak in foreign languages, so that outsiders - Parthians, Medes, Elamites and others - heard the apostles speak in their own language. So the effect of the Spirit is unity in diversity. It is the story of the Tower of Babel, but reversed. In Babel there was confusion of tongues and dispersion to all parts of the world. In the first reading, people from all over came together in Jerusalem and understood what was being said.

### **The Spirit is also for us**

The Spirit is also meant for us: the old people and the young of whom the prophet Joel speaks. It has also been said to us: *Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven.* We too can forgive because we have been forgiven. This is how we pray in the Lord's Prayer: *forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.* The Spirit also brings about unity, as we heard in the first reading. We are called to unity, but discord is often the reality, at micro level, and at macro level as we read in the newspapers and see on television. The only way out of the impasse is to cross the bridge, so that negotiation and conversation become possible. Listening to each other, learning to understand the other. Forgiveness also plays a role here. This is how peace and unity can come about.

In any case, the inspiration that Halík misses in today's church has to do with the forgiveness that has been bestowed upon us and with our mission to spread that Spirit of forgiveness. The new élan and mysticism that Halík and Rahner speak of may sound vague and unclear. In the light of today's readings, all of this can be made concrete: as you have been forgiven, so you have to forgive other people. I think that our life gains in depth when we realize that we are accepted by God, with our mistakes, and when we meet each other accepting them as God accepts us.