

Gospel John 20, 19- 23

The doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked. Try to imagine yourself being there in that locked room. The fear must have been palpable. The atmosphere must have been stifling. Then Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst. More fear! He is alive! What chastisements would he utter for their abandonment of him? But there are no bitter recriminations. There are merely words of peace. They must have been disbelieving, for he said "Peace be with you" a second time. And then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." It was like a breath of fresh air, but so much more than that. Jesus made it clear that he had forgiven them, and now they too would become his agents with the power to distribute his mercy to the world.

In an earlier passage in the Gospel of John Jesus tells his disciples "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth... He will take what is mine and declare it to you." One might imagine that the work of the Holy Spirit is to transfer or download into the minds of recipients a huge bucket of insider knowledge. It is true! The Holy Spirit will teach us things that we would otherwise never know, the secrets in the mind of God.

What Jesus wants for us is something much more wonderful than we could ever imagine. Jesus wants to make us sharers in his own divinity. This is a great mystery! Long ago St. Athanasius said that God became a human being so that we who are human might become God. This is not a bizarre statement or opinion. It is Catholic teaching. What Jesus desires is that together with him we share in that very same relationship that he himself has with the heavenly Father. This is not something that we could ever bring about on our own. This is what the Holy Spirit causes to happen.

His work is to divinize us, to make us like God in whose image we have been created.

How does this take place? There is a wonderful image from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah that will help us to understand it better. God is the potter. We are the clay [Is. 64, 8]. Like the potter who shapes the vessel with his hands from the inside, this is how the potter works, from the inside, so the Holy Spirit shapes our lives from the inside. Working from the inside the Holy Spirit makes us into a new creation. These are the very words that we find in the Baptismal Rite: "Today you have become a new creation." In the same baptismal rite the newly baptized are anointed with Holy Chrism. For this reason Baptism is also called a "Christening." Baptism makes us into another Christ.

Becoming another Christ is not solely the work of the Holy Spirit. It also requires our cooperation. We must desire it. We need to pray for it.

It is quite significant that the gospel writers noted that Jesus would go to some quiet place to pray. He did it often. Sometimes he would take some of his disciples with him. The Son of God prayed and he prayed at some very significant moments in his life, such as before he began his public ministry, when he called his first disciples, in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest. Everything began with prayer. Jesus was a man of prayer. We all are called to be people of prayer.

St. Francis de Sales used to say that one should pray for a half hour every day, except when you are busy. Then you need to pray for a full hour. If a Christian does not have the time to pray, he does not have the time to be a Christian. Jesus recommended that we ask the Heavenly Father and he will give us the Holy Spirit [Luke 11, 13]. The Holy Spirit will help us to pray.

Our destiny is shaped by our desires. As the Letter from Galatians reminds us, not all desires are healthy or salutary. Some desires are

actually toxic to the spiritual life and lead us away from life and friendship with God. They come from the still unhealed parts of our lives. They prevent us from experiencing what God wants to give us. Such desires need to be repudiated, rejected and abandoned as they will eventually lead us down the path to sin and sorrow. That is why at the heart of the Gospel there is the call to repentance, to abandon all the illusory desires that lead us away from God and cause us to sin.

But there are other desires, desires that are truly wholesome and unselfish, such as the desire to be of service to others or to give our lives for some worthy cause or become engaged in the spiritual and corporal works of mercy or to serve the Church in its mission in the world. Such desires not only delight God greatly; God responds to those desires by drawing us ever more deeply into his heart. There we experience with Jesus that we are a beloved child of God. To experience that is to know the Father. Our desires then burn ever more intensely. Our hearts are set ablaze.

It was after his conversion that St. Augustine said: “This very moment, I may, if I desire, become a friend of God.” Imagine that! This very moment, I may become a friend of God! If I desire it!

The only real question that now demands an answer from us on this feast of Pentecost is, Do you desire the friendship of God? Do you want what Jesus has? Do you want a life filled with the fruits of the Holy Spirit? Do you really want to be another Christ? Do you want the more that God is offering to you today?

Good friends, if you desire that, pray that Jesus will breathe upon you today and grant you a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit..... Yes, pray for it and just breathe the Spirit in.

Fr. Neil