

The Power of Pentecost

Thursday, September 20, 2007

Adventures in ACTS

Session #2

Last week's session was an exploration of chapter 1 of the Acts of the Apostles. This week, we explore chapter 2, which transmits the Pentecost event and *mystery*. As Jeff Cavins, the author of the Adventures program, suggests, the Acts of the Apostles could very easily be called the *Acts of the Holy Spirit*. This book, believed to be written by the same author as the third gospel, Luke, is about

- the early community of believers
- the birth of the Mystical Body

This book can be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit because we are talking about the community of those

- who have become children of God *in a new sense*
- who have encountered the God-man, the Christ
- who have been born again

which is precisely the work of the Holy Spirit.

We have the story of the early Church, of the Apostles, slightly overwhelmed, and not really understanding what they have gotten into,

- leading the first disciples
- gathering and steering new believers
- trying to share what they have been blessed to experience: *the Christ*.

We have the story of the *Christian* community, born in Jewish territory, then increased into Gentile territory.

And this is the work of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, if we consider the Church to be those who

- are bound to one another in divine love
- personally and communally participate in the very life of God

then, without the Holy Spirit, who is sent forth to realize this in us, there is no Church. The life of the Church is the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

In a real sense, as the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church also continues the work of salvation.

Let us situate what this means.

We need a very spiritual sense of Church

in order to understand really what is happening in this earliest period of the Church.

The New Covenant is the covenant in Jesus the Christ, the God-man.

It is a *covenant*: God joining himself to humanity in fidelity.

It is a *new* covenant:

God joining himself to humanity in fidelity *in a new way, a more intimate way*.
God taking humanity to himself, the Word becoming flesh
means greater closeness, greater intimacy.

The instrument for such closeness is precisely this humanity assumed by God, more particularly, assumed by the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word, the Son.

Now, we are joined to Christ in such a way that we become His Body.
His life is in us.

He is the head of this body, and “from His fullness we all received grace upon grace”
(John 1:16)

“We should grow in every way into Him who is the head, Christ.” (Ephesians 4:15)

Christ is “head over all things to the Church, his Body,
the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way”. (Ephesians 1:23; cf. Colossians 1:18)
If this is true, then God, whose purpose is to love the world until “Christ is all and in all”
(Colossians 3:11), continues to work to that end.

However, the Body of Christ, now glorified, is now present differently.

The Body of Christ is present in

- the Eucharist, the sacramental Body of Christ
- the Mystical Body of Christ

Christ feeds us his Body sacramentally so as to intensify His presence in us by grace
so to work in and through us.

God indeed works through us.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read of God
working through the members of the early Church.

This work of God makes of us all royal priests (1 Peter 2:9).

To reiterate: the Trinity continues the work of intimate renewal of humanity
and all of Creation, through the humanity of Christ.

His humanity (of course, one with his divinity and thus the Trinity)
is now present sacramentally and mystically.

The mystical presence really includes us, for it is via us!

Hence the words of such persons like Mother Teresa
who says that Christ only has our hands and our eyes and our smile.

This is the reality entrusted to the Apostles, whose growth they are,
with boldness and trepidation, trying to promote.

We see in this that the deeper reality of the Church, which lasts forever, is spiritual.

We also do witness in the Acts of the Apostles,
the beginnings of structure and leadership in the Christian community.

But the structure of the Church, the leaders of the Church, willed by God,
are entirely at the service of the Mystical Body.

Now that we have a “simple” perspective on what is more deeply occurring,
we have a few questions from the first session,
which we need to answer before looking at the “Power of Pentecost”.

Q 1: I believe that I have been taught that the spirit of God is in everyone’s soul from
conception until death. If this is true, is the spirit of God the same as the Holy Spirit?

Q 2: If it is, then why do we pray to receive the Holy Spirit?

Q 3: And why did Jesus not receive the Holy Spirit until He was baptized?

Q 1: The Spirit of God is mentioned as being present from the first moment of Creation. (Genesis 1:2).

The Spirit of God is the same as the Holy Spirit.

His presence suggests that Creation is a Trinitarian act, an act of the Trinity.

Q 2: Is the Holy Spirit present in everyone's soul from conception until death?

Yes, but we must speak of different presences, of different types of presence.

1. presence of *immensity*, or creative presence, i.e. God present to all things insofar as they are created, insofar as their very existence comes from Him, is "sustained" by Him.
2. presence of *grace*, or *re-creative* presence, i.e. God present in a new, more intimate, way, by grace, in the souls of His children
3. presence of *sacrament*, i.e. "in" the Eucharist

God is present in the second and third ways because of the Incarnation.

These two presences are proper to the New Covenant.

The first is the presence of God, the Triune God, and thus the Holy Spirit, in everyone's soul from conception *beyond* death into eternity.

The second is the presence of God, the Triune God, and thus the Holy Spirit, in the children of God, from their re-birth into eternity.

Q 3: Why do we pray to receive the Holy Spirit if He is with us from conception?

If we have already received the Holy Spirit

(at Baptism, more intimately than at our creation),

we do not, strictly speaking, pray to receive the Holy Spirit: *been there, done that!*

We pray for a "fresh outpouring", although this expression is somewhat misleading.

We are speaking of "more" Holy Spirit,

without it, by any means, being a *quantitative* thing.

Perhaps we should speak of new encounters with the Holy Spirit who is ever-present.

We pray

- to be taken hold of more
- that we be more receptive and cooperate more deeply
- that, by love, His presence deepen in us

In a sense we ask for the grace to love more, for by divine love, the Holy Spirit indwells us.

Why did Jesus not receive the Holy Spirit until he was baptized, if the Holy Spirit is given at conception *de facto*?

We have cleared up (somewhat!) how the Holy Spirit is present from conception.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in Jesus from conception was much greater than this.

Jesus had the *fullness* of grace from the moment of conception

(in which we believe Mary uniquely *participated* from the first moment of her conception, hence hers being an immaculate conception).

Jesus "had" the Holy Spirit from the first moment of conception.

His humanity was perfectly seized and moved by the Holy Spirit
from the first moment of conception.

At Baptism he did not receive the Holy Spirit.

What occurred then?

Jesus was baptized with the Baptism that John gave.

Such Baptism did not confer the gift of the Holy Spirit (which, again Jesus did not need!).

In being baptized, Jesus *inaugurates* Baptism; he does not, strictly speaking, *receive* it.

St. John Chrysostom says, Jesus was baptized,

“that he might bequeath the sanctified water to those who were to be baptized afterwards”

This means that the power of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Luke 4:14 regarding Jesus,
with which a parallel is established regarding the power given in the early Church,
was not bestowed on Jesus at that time,

but was simply present, and being particularly exercised.

The descent of the dove was a revelation for those present and for us,

a revelation of the Trinity.

The “anointing” of Jesus is a “revelatory designation”, so to speak.

Pentecost is a particular outpouring, a particular *visit* of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit had already come, had already been bestowed.

At the end of John’s gospel, after the Resurrection, Jesus breathes on the disciples,
and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22).

The Holy Spirit always comes with power. Most properly he comes with love.

The power of the Holy Spirit does not begin at Pentecost.

It would be more precise to say that

the Holy Spirit had not come in this *charismatic* fashion.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended in *manifest* fashion

bestowing particular “good gifts”, called *charisms*.

This feast of Pentecost implied that the Apostles

“wait for the promise of the Father about which they had heard Jesus speak.”

(From the workbook): What did you learn about the role and value of waiting on God?

Saint John of the Cross (16th c.) says,

**Simply by making us wait God increases our desire, which in turn enlarges our soul,
making it able to receive what is to be given to us.**

Now, of these charisms, the most manifest and impressive may be tongues.

Re-read: 2:1-7, 12-13

Love it!

Drunk! “Occifer, occifer, take me drunk I’m home!”

Drunk with the Holy Spirit.

Their demeanor resembles inebriation.

And inebriation, in turn, serves as an interesting metaphor

for being seized by the Holy Spirit.

Inebriation suggests being affected very tangibly and really and thoroughly.

Tongues is one of seven charisms, which we need to situate the bigger picture.

Grace, a participation in the very life of God
the “imperishable seed”, to use Peter’s “definition” (I Peter 1:23)

Three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love

Seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:1-2) – given that we might exercise faith, hope, and love, as deeply as possible, that we might “become more amenable to the promptings of the Holy Spirit” (Summa Theologica Ia IIae, Q 68, art. 3, respondeo)

= for the sake of personal holiness

Twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity (Galatians 5:22-23) – the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit in us, i.e. what a child of God looks like when truly a child of God, i.e. when transfigured by the Holy Spirit

= the manifestation of personal holiness

Nine Charisms of the Holy Spirit: the word of wisdom, the word of science, increased faith, healing, the power of miracles, prophecy, the discerning of spirits, the gift of tongues, the interpretation of tongues (I Corinthians 12:4-11)

=for the sake of the community, i.e. to awaken the community (not for personal holiness)

Other charisms are listed, but they seem to pertain to ministers of the Church
in the exercise of their office, i.e. charisms for governance and preaching.

For a good perspective on these, see the Catechism #800.

One final question that arose for me, for which I simply offer a lead to answer.

What is it for Jesus to “receive the promise of the Holy Spirit” (2:33) when he needs not the Holy Spirit?

Does it not perhaps refer to the glorification of His body?

During Jesus’ earthly pilgrimage, glory, i.e. the overflow of divine light and divine love, was withheld from his body that he might be able to experience pain and the like.

After the Resurrection,

- His body is of course glorified, and thus seized by the Holy Spirit in a new way
- His body becomes the perfect instrument for the gift of the Holy Spirit

Just a thought..!