

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jan 24th 2016

The ancient apostolic creed we Christians recite each Sunday boldly professes: “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-Giver.” I wonder how many of us grasp the profound implications of this statement, implications both for Jesus and for ourselves. Today’s readings invite us to celebrate the life-giving role of the Spirit in Jesus’ life, in the Corinthian community -- and in our own lives!

The Spirit had profound implications for Jesus. Listen to Jesus’ first public proclamation after his forty days in the desert: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.”

Recall that Jesus had lived unobtrusively for thirty years in Nazareth and been known locally merely as the carpenter’s son. Then Jesus left Nazareth abruptly to be baptized by John the Baptist. During prayer after the baptism Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove and he heard the voice from heaven, “You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased.”

Perplexed, Jesus was led by the Spirit to the desert for forty days and then back home to Nazareth where he made the startling announcement to his local synagogue, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” Jesus understood that God had chosen him -- as God had chosen previous prophets -- to speak on behalf of God to the people of Israel.

Obediently Jesus left Nazareth and began his public ministry of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. Jesus forthrightly acknowledged that God had called him and that he was responding to God’s call: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.”

And receiving the Spirit had profound implications for the Corinthians. Paul instructs the Corinthians that something momentous had happened to them through their reception of the Spirit in baptism: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.”

Paul reminds the Corinthians that reception of the Spirit had concrete implications for their lives. Just as the Spirit called Jesus to new ministry, so now the Spirit was calling them. Some would be called to proclaim the Good News beyond their local communities. All would be called to serve local communities in various roles. But all calls all came from the same source, the Spirit.

And the Spirit they received is the same Spirit Jesus received. The Corinthians are now so intimately united with Jesus through the Spirit that now they are the “Body of Christ” and are now called to proclaim Christ to their world as Christ’s ambassadors.

Today in 2016 we are the Body of Christ for in one Spirit we were all baptized! Our readings prompt a basic question: How is the Spirit calling us to serve our communities and our world? Have we responded to our vocations of being Christ’s ambassadors proclaiming and witnessing to Christ both within our local communities as well as beyond them?

Perhaps a brief note on the first reading is appropriate. The Old Testament reading from the Book of Nehemiah reminds us of the great gift God gave Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai – the gift of the

Law, the Torah. Exiled in Babylon for some sixty years many of the community lapsed in observance of this Law. Now having returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, both the high priest Ezra and governor Nehemiah proclaimed and recommitted the Israel to renewed fidelity to the covenant. All were weeping with joy.

But how much more can we Christians be joyful for the law of the Spirit given us through faith and baptism, the law now written not on scrolls but on our hearts! The responsorial psalm catches our joy: “Your words, O Lord, are Spirit and life.”

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