

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, May 15th 2016

Various affections are at work within the human heart that move us to do some things and to avoid others. Certainly one of the strongest influences on us is fear. We instinctively move away from what we perceive to be harmful.

As the disciples gather “on that first day of the week,” the Gospel of John records that the doors of the room were locked because of fear. Perhaps they feared that Jesus’ fate would soon be their own. Yet, before this crowd of his friends crippled by fear, Jesus appears. As we picture that scene, we might imagine that the sight of Jesus Risen from the dead would by itself be an antidote to their fear. Surely this unexpected but welcome appearance would have filled them with unstoppable courage.

However, the gospel confirms that the sight of Jesus alone was not sufficient to remove fear. That was given through the gift of the Holy Spirit. With that heavenly gift, Acts tells us, these disciples, once gathered behind locked doors, move out to proclaim Jesus, risen from the dead, and do so even at great peril. The Holy Spirit, the Consoler, removes fear.

St. Paul likewise confirms that those who receive the “Spirit of adoption,” are not to live in fear, but in the confidence that comes with being beloved daughters and sons of the Father of Jesus whom they may address also as Abba.

On Pentecost Sunday the familiar images of light, water and wind, all give clues to the marvelous and mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. But we ought to know also that the Holy Spirit is the giver of courage, the one who overcomes our fear. And in the light of that we might ask: where are we touched by fear today? Where are we sitting behind locked doors? We want to welcome the Holy Spirit to those places, inviting the Consoler to invade our hearts, to touch those places and to pour into us the gift of courage.

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