



Homily at Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit

July 24, 2002

Readings: Rm 8: 14-17; Ps 104: 24, 29-35; Jn 7: 37-39
World Youth Day in Toronto

Come Holy Spirit, and open our hearts to the truth of the readings we've just heard.

One of the tricks of the devil is to attack our sense of perception. When we can't see clearly, we can't act wisely. And so the devil tries to foul up our instruments. He wants us to misread our gauges and set off in the wrong direction. He wants us to hold back when we should give ourselves completely, or go full throttle when we should be cautious.

With today's brief readings, we may feel tempted to minimize what we hear. It's easy to underestimate the promises God makes to us in the Letter to the Romans and the short passage from John's Gospel. But don't let that happen. Don't let the devil cloud your vision.

Saint Paul says that by the power of the Holy Spirit we've been made adopted sons and daughters of God. That means we're co-heirs of God's kingdom with God's Son, Jesus Christ. We share with Jesus Christ an inheritance of glory that will never end. Nothing in this world can hold a candle to the joy of God's kingdom, and God wants that joy to belong to us.

Most of us don't think too much about the Holy Spirit, but He's no stranger in our lives. When we say, "God is love," we're talking about the Holy Spirit in a very particular way. Christians believe in one God, but a God who is a community of persons, a Trinity of persons. And the love within that Trinity between Father and Son is so intense and so creative from all eternity that it's another loving person; a third member of the Trinity.

That's the Holy Spirit. We received Him in Baptism, and He sealed us in Confirmation. It's the Holy Spirit who enables us to proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord and to address Almighty God with the words – Abba, Father! It's the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who leads us to share the Body and Blood of Christ at this Eucharist. It's the Holy Spirit who, in the course of our lifetimes, transforms us from sinners to saints.

The lesson of today's Scripture readings, and the lesson of all Scripture, is that God doesn't limit his love for us. He can't. No matter how badly or how often we sin, we can always turn back to Him and He'll welcome us, because love is His nature. Love is a living member of the Trinity. So we need to ask ourselves this morning, what does that obligate us to do? Shouldn't we love Him in return – or at least try not to limit our openness to God's love?

While Saint Paul describes the glory that waits for those who share in the passion of Jesus, Saint John testifies to the strength of God's desire to give us His Spirit.

The scene is the Temple area in Jerusalem. It's the final day of the great Jewish feast of Shelters or Tabernacles. In Hebrew the word is *Sukkoth*. The Temple liturgy for the final day of the festival included prayers for rain; a procession in which jars of "living water" were carried; and prayers and Scripture passages recalling the miracle of water from the rock worked by Moses in the desert.

When we know this background, we can better understand the meaning of Jesus crying aloud: "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

This is a very bold proclamation. If we misunderstand it, we risk losing the gift of eternal life. Jesus is saying, "I am the rock from which flows life-giving water." Jesus alone is the source of living water that satisfies the thirst of the human heart. And this living water is the Holy Spirit who overflows in the hearts of those who believe in Jesus with a humble and mighty faith.

The urgency of Jesus crying out shows us God's intense desire to save us and to love us with intimacy beyond anything we can imagine. And this should move all of us to ask ourselves a few very simple questions.

Do I thirst? Do I desire this living water more than anything? More than the world and all its toys and distractions? More than my own plans for my life?

Do I believe in Jesus Christ? Really believe with my whole strength so that I'm ready to follow Him wherever He leads me? Even to Calvary?

Today Jesus cries out to us and waits for an answer. We mustn't underestimate His desire for us, or our need for Him.

Today, here and now, in this Mass, I want you to join me in coming to Jesus and drinking from the spring of life, the spring of God's love. And when these days of pilgrimage end, let's go forth from here filled to overflowing with this river of living water, ready to share eternal life with everyone we meet.