

Sixth Sunday of Easter – 14 May 2023 (Mother's Day)

1 Corinthians 12:1-13

1 Now, concerning what you wrote about the gifts from the Holy Spirit. I want you to know the truth about them, my friends. 2 You know that while you were still heathen, you were led astray in many ways to the worship of lifeless idols. 3 I want you to know that no one who is led by God's Spirit can say "A curse on Jesus!" and no one can confess "Jesus is Lord," without being guided by the Holy Spirit. 4 There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. 5 There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. 6 There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to all for their particular service. 7 The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all. 8 The Spirit gives one person a message full of wisdom, while to another person the same Spirit gives a message full of knowledge. 9 One and the same Spirit gives faith to one person, while to another person he gives the power to heal. 10 The Spirit gives one person the power to work miracles; to another, the gift of speaking God's message; and to yet another, the ability to tell the difference between gifts that come from the Spirit and those that do not. To one person he gives the ability to speak in strange tongues, and to another he gives the ability to explain what is said. 11 But it is one and the same Spirit who does all this; as he wishes, he gives a different gift to each person. 12 Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. 13 In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink.

John 14:15-21

15 "If you love me, you will obey my commandments. 16 I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. 17 He is the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God. The world cannot receive him, because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him, because he remains with you and is in you. 18 "When I go, you will not be left all alone; I will come back to you. 19 In a little while the world will see me no more, but you will see me; and because I live, you also will live. 20 When that day comes, you will know that I am in my Father and that you are in me, just as I am in you. 21 "Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. My Father will love those who love me; I too will love them and reveal myself to them."

Focus: The motherly nature of the Holy Spirit

Function: Help listeners discover the motherly presence of the Spirit in their lives.

Today's Gospel reading is a continuation of last Sunday's. The context is Jesus's last supper with the disciples before his passion. After washing the disciples' feet to demonstrate to them the spirit of servanthood that they ought to embrace, Jesus assured them that he was going ahead to prepare the "rooms" for them in the Father's house and would return to receive them there. While the disciples were confused and lost that they couldn't follow Jesus to wherever he was going, Jesus assured them, saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me." Jesus also emphasized that in knowing him, we know God the Father. And last Sunday's passage ends with Jesus's reassurance to us that he will do whatever we ask for in his name for the glory of God.

Let us put ourselves in the Upper Room with the disciples and Jesus. If we look around, what could we see? Judas Iscariot had already left the room; Peter, Thomas and Philip had raised the questions trying to understand the situation better. Hopefully, all the disciples had come to a clearer understanding after hearing Jesus's answers. I think that is what Jesus was hoping for as he continued to reassure them, saying, "Come on, guys, if you love me, you will obey my commandments, won't you? And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God."

In other words, Jesus, the first Helper, has revealed God the Father by letting us know him. He has become for us the Way to Life in God. And now in his place to journey with the disciples and us is the second Helper, the Holy Spirit, who will dwell with us (and in us) forever. This is God's gift to us, to everyone who believes in Jesus, the Spirit of the living God dwells in us forever. Indeed, we are all blessed!

Since we are gifted with the Holy Spirit, so how much have we known the Spirit? How much have we experienced the work of the Spirit in our lives? What are your experiences of the Spirit at work in you?

To begin with, it is our belief that the Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity. That is, the Spirit is God, co-equal and co-exist with and of the same essence as God the Father and Jesus the Son. In other words, God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct from one another in terms of their personal relationship but are co-equally and co-existingly God, the being of God. Therefore, they do not exist independently from each other. With this theological understanding, the gifting of the Holy Spirit is God gifting God-self to us. This is the reconciliation of God with humanity; the completion of God's ultimate desire for humanity.

Jesus said, "The world cannot receive the Spirit, because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him, because he remains with you and is in you." Hence, we get the idea that the Spirit is invisible.

But what is the Spirit's gender? Is it masculine since the pronoun "he" or "him" has been used to name the Spirit? It is noteworthy that Jesus spoke Aramaic, which was a branch of Hebrew, and the New Testament was written in Greek and subsequently translated to Latin. And interestingly, the gender of the word for "Spirit" is feminine in Hebrew (רוּחַ, rūah), neuter in Greek (πνεῦμα, pneûma) and masculine in Latin (spiritus). On top of that, most current English translations of the Greek New Testament, including today's Gospel reading, use the male pronouns to describe the Spirit even though it is neuter in Greek. This is confusing, isn't it?

In linguistics, this is grammatical gender which is a way to categorize nouns and is often not related to real-world qualities. Hence, the gender of the Spirit is a mystery to me. However, if you wish, you may pick a gender for the Spirit for yourself IF that helps you to have a more affectionate relationship with the Spirit.

Today is Mother's Day. And as a tribute to all mothers and motherly figures, I wish to reflect with you the motherly nature of the Holy Spirit.

If we look at a typical family, most often it is the mother who would comfort the children when they are physically or emotionally hurt like a footy injury, a failed examination or a first break-up. It is often the mother who nurses the children who have fallen ill, even if it's a common cold. And it is often the mother who prepares the meals for the family and organises their lunch boxes and reminds them to bring the essentials to school or work. The mother combs the children's hair or ties their plaits and teaches them to tie their shoelaces. The list goes on and on as a mother's role is 24/7 and around the clock. Hooray to all mothers and motherly figures!

To me, the Holy Spirit is like a loving mother whom I have just described. I wonder if your experience of the Spirit is similar. There is a growing recognition that the Spirit is described using qualities that come most naturally and common to women and mothers. What do you think?

When I was bedridden in the hospital during my bone marrow transplant, unable to eat or talk, the Spirit gave me extraordinary peace and the endurance to bear the pain due to the side effects while I requested the morphine to be reduced to the minimum so that I could be alert daily.

The Spirit moves my heart to be compassionate to people's plight as they share their struggles in life, and the Spirit opens my ears to attentively listen while giving me words to pastorally care for them.

Each week in preparing my sermon reflection, as I reflect on the Bible passage, I couldn't begin to write until the Spirit gives me the picture or idea to relate the

passage to you. Prayerfully, I would wait for the Spirit's prompting as I research and reflect, continually asking myself what is the relevance of the passage to our community now. I have experienced the Spirit like a loving mother by my side all the time.

I like the analogy which Ken brought up in our Wednesday Bible Study: the Spirit is like the radio wave; it's everywhere around us and we just need to be attuned to receive it. Indeed, when we are tuned into the right frequency, we receive the Spirit's message and realize its work loud and clear. But whenever we tune out, we lose the reception and miss the Spirit's presence even though it is still there with us. Unknown to us, just as a mother is sad and worries about a child going wayward and on the wrong side of the law, the Spirit grieves too when we insist on walking our own way instead of Christ's (see Ephesians 4:30). And the Spirit is always there nudging us to soften our stubborn-hearts and get back on the right way again.

Paul in Galatians 5 assures us that when we live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit, we shall bear the fruit of the Spirit. We shall have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are essential to our character building. So, how could we resist not bearing this fruit which is a wonderful gift from God for us to be better people in relation to others?

Moreover, today's first reading from 1 Corinthians 12 reminds us that the Holy Spirit dwelling in us gives us various spiritual gifts for us to serve the Lord. It says, "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. ... The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all. The Spirit gives one person a message full of wisdom, while to another person the same Spirit gives a message full of knowledge. One and the same Spirit gives faith to one person, while to another person he gives the power to heal. The Spirit gives one person the power to work miracles; to another, the gift of speaking God's message; and to yet another, the ability to tell the difference between gifts that come from the Spirit and those that do not. To one person he gives the ability to speak in strange tongues, and to another he gives the ability to explain what is said. But it is one and the same Spirit who does all this; as he wishes, he gives a different gift to each person." Therefore, we are all gifted with unique spiritual gifts.

So, what spiritual gifts do you have, and how are you using these gifts to serve the Lord? If we could recall the parable of the talents that Jesus told us in Matthew's Gospel, we are urged to be faithful servants who invest and multiply the God-given talents instead of being the one who buries the talents in the ground. Hence, let us use the abilities God has given us and the spiritual gifts we have received in serving this community and beyond.

If there is anyone present here or over Zoom who unfortunately has not experienced motherly love before, I am truly sorry. May I invite you to this experience of the Holy Spirit by attuning to the Spirit and letting the motherly nature of the Spirit touch you, nurse you, comfort you and provide for you. Christ Jesus has given us the Spirit to dwell in us forever. Amen.