

# Father John's Gospel Reflection



## Gospel

### GOSPEL – SUNDAY, 4 JUNE, 2017

#### - Pentecost Sunday

(John 20:19-23)

**As the Father sent me, so I send you: Receive the Holy Spirit.**

In the evening of the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came in and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you,' and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you.'

'As the Father sent me,  
so I am sending you.'

After saying this he breathed on them and said:

'Receive the Holy Spirit.  
For those whose sins you forgive,  
they are forgiven;  
for those whose sins you retain,  
they are retained.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

## Reflection

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It's ironic- Pentecost, that great feast of the church celebrated fifty days after Easter, the image of tongues of fire, multiple languages, but none of this mentioned in John's Gospel of this Pentecost Sunday. Our traditional Pentecost liturgy is based on Chapter 2, The Acts of the Apostles. The Johannine Pentecost has little of this drama.

In John the Spirit comes at Easter, during Jesus' first post-resurrection appearance to a collection of his followers. In this passage we encounter the Spirit with less of a universal tone, in comparison to Acts - the focus here is more particular, focussing on the identity and sending out the community.

Now, recalling the moment when God breathed life into the original earth person in Genesis 2:7, Jesus now breathes the Spirit of life *into*, not merely on his followers (John 20:22). A new creation has come about, but this creation does not replace the "world", rather it engages it!

It is the final part of this passage that creates some controversy. Sure, we believe that Jesus bestowed peace upon his anxious followers. Sure, we believe that Jesus fills them with the Holy Spirit, but what of that statement that Jesus tells them they can forgive or retain other people's sins? Jesus is not appointing the church as his moral watchdog, nor does he commission it to arbitrate people's assets and liabilities on a heavenly balance sheet.

For John, Jesus talks about sin as unbelief, the unwillingness to grasp the truth of God as manifested in Jesus. Then Jesus tells his followers - *ALL his followers*, that through his Spirit they can set people free or release them (a better translation than "forgive") in 20:23, so that they now can be part of seeing others come to believe in Jesus and what he discloses.

*Fr John Boyd-Boland ofm*

- We need to be bold and courageous rather than cautious in witnessing to Jesus and his message.
- Jesus is already dwelling within us and inspiring us to go forth in a world populated by multiple religions and plagued by ecclesial hypocrisy.
- In our being confirmed nothing more than mere ritual, or do we believe we are really empowered by the Spirit to be Jesus for our world?

## Take home Message