

Reflection

5/25/22

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“I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now.” That’s not a very comforting message; it suggests that the news may not be good, or at least that it is unexpected.

Although it is a very different story, I am reminded of a family in the parish in Georgia where I worked years ago. The family had three or four children, and the mother was expecting. The night came when she went to the hospital and the father was with her. Grandma stayed with the children who, despite their excitement, finally went to sleep.

In the morning, their father came into the kitchen to report. Did you want a boy or a girl? he asked his daughter. A girl! she said. I want a little sister. Well, he said, you have your wish. And what did you want he asked his son? I wanted a little brother he said, a bit downcast. Well, said the father, you have your wish. There was silence for a moment, then they shouted all at once: Twins! Mamma had twins! That was it! Once more she had satisfied everyone.

In the case of the disciples, it was the promised Spirit...the Spirit of truth, who would guide them to all truth. Day by day, in this season, we have sections of the Gospel according to John. The words are full of promise, but they remain mysterious. We find some of the same ambiguity in the daily readings from Acts. Paul seeks to acknowledge the local culture and religion by noting the altar to “an Unknown God.” The Athenians are not impressed. Once Paul mentions resurrection of the dead, they are finished with him.

But God is not finished with us. This particular day, the liturgical calendar, the Church offers us centuries worth of men and women who accepted what the Athenians could not. They lived that life in very diverse ways.

- In the 8th century, the Church in England produced a monk, known as the Venerable Bede.

- From 11th century Italy came Gregory VII (a Hildebrand) who was Pope from 1073-1085.
- Also from Italy is the Carmelite mystic, S. Mary Magdelene de' Pazzi (1566-1607). She is frequently quoted by St. Alphonsus in his writings.
- In a closer century, we have St. Madeleine Sophie Barat (1779-1865) French Foundress of the Society of the Sacred Heart.

This returns us to the Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who guided each of these saints to the truth. John's Gospel promises that the Spirit will guide us to all truth. The Acts of the Apostles records dramatic actions of the Spirit working through the disciples.

Still, not a great deal has been written about the Spirit in Church documents. When one of my students in Rome told me that her foundress has urged Pope Leo XIII to produce the encyclical on the Holy Spirit, I was a bit hesitant. I was not aware of many foundresses who advised popes. But the truth is, Pope Leo XIII published the first encyclical on the Holy Spirit, *Divinum illud munus* in 1897, and it was, in fact, written at the urging of Elena Guerra (1835-1914) foundress of the Oblates of the Holy Spirit—an Institute first known as the Congregation of St. Zita. It is a document of 13 sections—not many for the papal encyclical. It was almost 100 years later that P. John Paul II produced *Dominum et Vivificantem* on the Holy Spirit in 1986. This text now has 67 sections.

When all is said and done, we return to the words of Jesus in today's Gospel: When the Spirit of truth comes, he/she will guide you to all truth. And, as we remember from another place, the truth will set us free.