

(T) PENTECOST

(MAY 31ST, 2020)

Readings for Today: Acts 2: 1 – 11; Psalm 104 (103) 1,24,29-34; 1 Corinthians 12: 3 – 7, 12 – 13; John 20: 19 – 23.

Today, as we reach the end of Eastertide, the Church gives us two accounts of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The first is Saint Luke's account, in the Acts of the Apostles, of the first Christian Pentecost, and the second is Saint John's account, in what was originally the final chapter of his Gospel, of the evening of the first Christian Sunday.

Someone reading the New Testament as if it were 21st century journalists' accounts would, perhaps, conclude that one of them must be wrong. But that would be to misunderstand the purposes of the two authors. Luke says at the beginning of his Gospel that he intends to *write an orderly account ...so that you may have certainty concerning the things you were taught*. And he begins his second volume, the Acts, in the same way. He was intending to give a historical account of the beginnings of the Christian mission. That is how the Church has understood Luke's writings, which is why the liturgical calendar sets out the events of the Resurrection, the Ascension and the Gift of the Spirit over the fifty days from Easter to Pentecost. The practical advantage of this scheme is that it gives us the opportunity to reflect at leisure on the meaning of the great events of our salvation.

But the Gospel of John has a different, but complementary, purpose. In his first chapter he tells us how the purpose of God was worked out in the whole incarnate life of Jesus: *we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father*. And in the rest of the gospel he tells us how this *glory* was revealed. Sometimes it was by the signs Jesus performed, but more often when the evangelist speaks of glory he is looking forward to its revelation in the lifting up of Jesus on the cross. It is at that moment that the purpose of God is achieved. The evangelist records that, just after Jesus had cried out *It is accomplished*, he *bowed his head and handed over his spirit*. For John the death of Jesus, his exaltation and the gift of the Spirit are all part of a single act – the glorification of Jesus in fulfilling the will of the Father. So he does not describe the Resurrection, the Ascension and the Gift of the Holy Spirit as taking place over fifty days. For him they are all part of the one mystery, which we call Easter – for which today we rejoice: Alleluia!