May 11, 2008  Pentecost Day* (Cycle A)

Gospel reading  John 20:19-23

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”

*Originally the Jewish feast to offer God the first fruits of the harvest. It was celebrated seven weeks after Passover; thus, the Greek name Pentekoste, meaning the 50th day.

Brief commentary:

The Gospel of John gives a unique account of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. At this first encounter of Jesus with the believing community, he breathed the Spirit on the disciples and simultaneously sent them out as the Father had sent him. The mission of Jesus, the proclamation of the Reign of God, a reign of love, justice and peace, is now placed in the hands of the disciples. They must carry out the work of making God’s compassion and forgiveness known to all. By means of this sending, the Eleven were made apostles, which means, “those sent.” The last verses clearly speak of the community’s power to forgive in the Name of Jesus. Through the ever present power of the Spirit, the Christian community will be able to offer healing and union with God and one another. This is John’s version of Pentecost.

*The Greek word for Spirit (pneuma) highlights the dynamic and unexpected action of the Spirit, which, like the wind, blows where it wills.

Today’s reading offers three significant messages:

● The action of “breathing” upon the disciples recalls Genesis 2:7 where God breathed on the first man and gave him life.
● The gift of the Risen Christ is Peace and echoes John 16:22, “I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.”
● Through the Spirit the Church possesses the power to forgive sins. We are all called to forgive one another. (The Council of Trent in 1551 defined that this power to forgive sins is exercised in the sacrament of penance).

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

1. Do I allow people or events to take Christ’s joy away from me? Explain.

2. Am I an instrument of peace and forgiveness in my family, place of work and community? How?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 575; 643; 645; 654; 659; 730; 858; 976; 1087; 1120; 1287; 1441-1442; 1461; 1485-1486; 2839.