

Third Sunday of Easter
May 4, 2025
Year of the Holy Spirit

“We are witnesses of these things, as is the Holy Spirit that God has given to those who obey Him.” (Acts 5:32)

During the Easter Season, we have many opportunities to read from and reflect upon Saint Luke’s biblical work, The Acts of the Apostles. This tremendous book covers, ever so briefly, the Apostolic Church. This is the time which saw the beginnings of the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to other parts of the Roman empire. In our selection for this weekend, the Apostles Peter and John are brought before the religious leaders. They boldly proclaim their faith in the Resurrection of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. They must speak of Jesus, whom they have seen and heard, for in doing so they are faithfully obeying God. In this, their proclamation of the Gospel, we can see manifested the work of the Holy Spirit who was sent by Jesus to guide His Church.

You may recall we read from Saint John’s Gospel last weekend (John 20:19-31). We reflected upon the words of Jesus to Thomas: *“Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”* (John 20:29). The Apostles and the disciples of Jesus, although initially afraid, are strengthened by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Their faith in Jesus, who He is and His saving mission, impel them to proclaim Him to all. Throughout the Book of Acts, we can read about the activity of the Holy Spirit, Who continues to strengthen these first Christians and descends upon those newly converted to the Christian Faith. The direct work of the Holy Spirit is on full display when mass conversions and miraculous healings occur.

For you and I, these stories of the Apostolic Church might appear as pious legends once told in an ancient time. We live in a time where the Christian faith appears shrinking rather than growing. We might go so far as to question; “What is wrong with us, our generation?” Why do we not see those same manifestations of the Holy Spirit present before us? As hard as it may appear for us to see, the Holy Spirit is still present and working in our times. We can deduce His Activity using the Gifts and Virtues He instills and continues to inspire within all of us. It is the Theological Virtue of Hope which we may reflect upon today.

The Virtue of Hope is the unyielding confidence we have in the words of Jesus which continue to support us as we embrace our cross, rather, our share of His Cross. In much the same way Peter and John were able to “boldly” proclaim the name of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, this same Holy Spirit fills us with His light and life. In essence, the more we embrace the Cross of Jesus, the more the Holy Spirit embraces us. It may seem natural for us to become discouraged as we see our own faults, temptations and weaknesses displayed before us. Coupled with this, our prayer life has become arid and we find ourselves repeating the words of Jesus as He hung upon His Cross: *“Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani? My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”* (Matthew 27:46). This discouragement is a temptation against the virtue of Hope which the Holy Spirit

gifts us. The irony of this feeling of ours is, the closer we become to Jesus, the more we experience what He suffered and still suffers. His Love for us lead Him to die for us. Our love for Him joins us in that moment. We want to ease His suffering by living faithfully and encouraging others to do the same. The Apostles and disciples will travel, suffer and die to see all men be reconciled back with God. This is why, despite the threats of the Sanhedrin, the Apostles continue to preach and work in the name of Jesus.

For your own private reading, I would like to offer a few sentences from the Letter of the Romans to the Corinthians or First Clement. First, let me offer a brief history of First Clement. This letter is one of, if not the earliest, writings of Christianity which is not found in the Bible. It is attributed to Clement, the third Bishop of Rome, Peter being the first, and is dated around the same time as Saint John's Book of Revelation. The virtue of Hope, our persistent confidence in the words and Word of God, is affirmed in paragraph 27 as it states:

“With this hope, therefore, let our souls be bound to Him who is faithful in His promises and righteous in His judgments. He who commanded us not to lie all the more will not lie Himself, for nothing is impossible with God, except to lie. Therefore let our faith in Him be rekindled within us, and let us understand that all things are near to Him.”