Day by Day
Feasts, events, holidays, and thoughts for the daily preacher
Week of May 19, 2013
by Peter Scagnelli

Sunday, May 19, 2013
Solemnity of Pentecost Sunday

Vigil: Genesis 11:1–9 or Exodus 19:3–8a, 16–20b or Ezekiel 37:1–14 or Joel 3:1–5; Psalm 104; Romans 8:22–27; John 7:37–39

Extended Vigil: Genesis 11:1–9 with Psalm 33; Exodus 19:3–8a, 16–20b with Canticle of Daniel 3 or Psalm 19; Ezekiel 37:1–14 with Psalm 107; Joel 3:1–5 with Psalm 104; Romans 8:22–27; John 7:37–39

Day: Acts 2:1–11; Psalm 104; 1 Corinthians 12:3b–7, 12–13 or Romans 8:8–17; John 20:19–23 or John 14:15–16, 23b–26

Readings at the Vigil Mass
• To celebrate the Year of Faith called by Benedict XVI, Pope Francis is preserving at this Vigil in Saint Peter’s Square with members of “Ecclesial Movements,” renewal groups that have sprung up throughout the Church in recent years. Though the “extended vigil” of Pentecost is still new to us (Roman Missal, Third Edition), its format is familiar from the Easter Vigil. As an alternative to the “simple” vigil Mass, this “extended” vigil features four Old Testament readings, each followed by a Responsorial Psalm and a Collect rich in scriptural and liturgical imagery—a fitting conclusion to Easter Time.

Genesis: In contrast to Babel, where many languages divide the human race, Pentecost celebrates the proclamation of one faith, understood in the many diverse languages of those who hear the Apostles’ preaching. Exodus: Whereas fire and lightning attend the revelation of God’s Law on Sinai, tongues of fire, accompanied by wind—but not by fear—empower the Apostles to proclaim Jesus’ law of love. As Ezekiel saw the Spirit gathering scattered bones together and breathing new life into them, so from the Apostles’ Pentecost preaching, the Spirit imparts Jesus’ new life to souls parched for truth and scattered among a diversity of nations and beliefs, gathering them as disciples into one new faith community. Through Joel, the Lord promised an outpouring of the Spirit for the renewal of all creation; and on Pentecost, Jesus’ Spirit descends to begin that very mission, although with a “remnant” whose energies seem spent and whose visions seem to have failed.

To all who wrestle with the gap—in Church and self—between the boundless potential envisioned by the Prophets and Jesus and life’s more sober reality, Paul reassures us that, whatever our trials, the Spirit gives us a share in the birthing of God’s new creation. Moreover, the Spirit prays for us and within us, Jesus himself inviting all of us to drink deeply of that Spirit, a free gift to all believers.

Pentecost is traditionally celebrated as “the Birthday of the Church,” coinciding in the Northern Hemisphere with nature’s rebirth and focusing our faith on the Church’s spiritual motherhood: birth, not death; the womb (an ancient image for the baptismal font), not the tomb. This year’s Easter Vigil Gospel asked, “Why do you seek the Living One among the dead?” (Luke 24:5). Today, “on the last and greatest day of the feast” (John 7:37), Jesus, aware that we still seek him in a world where a “culture of death” too often reigns, still thirst for a life only Jesus can bestow, reassures us that the Living One has sought and found us and will satisfy our thirst. Not only that! Jesus’ Spirit, poured forth into us, will also flow from us (7:38) as we give ourselves to the “New Evangelization,” working with the Spirit to revive and refresh a parched world that thirsts for truth, love, peace.

Readings at Mass During the Day
• To communicate the full power of Acts’ Pentecost story, some communities provide a setting in which to contrast it with the Vigil’s Genesis or Exodus readings. Time for quiet reflection could precede the beginning of Mass, accompanied perhaps by the Veni Creator Spiritus, followed by the proclamation of Genesis or Exodus. Then, during Mass, the homily can note that the Pentecost Spirit does not restore the uniformity of language that existed before Babel. Rather, on Pentecost, the Spirit creates a unity-in-diversity, people of many languages hearing the one Gospel of God’s reconciling love in Christ, but each in his or her own tongue. If Exodus is read, the homily could note that our Jewish friends have just celebrated Shavuot, God’s giving of the Torah on Sinai amidst terrifying wind and fire. By contrast, the infant Church is gathered not at the foot of a towering mountain, but in the intimacy of “the Cenacle,” a “circle of prayer” that includes “Mary the Mother of Jesus” (Acts 1:14), present always in our gatherings, through her name’s honored place in every Eucharistic Prayer. Thus, the Gospel that goes forth into all the world—through the Apostles’ mission then and the Church’s “New Evangelization” now—is one, but its manifestation, in worship and witness, liturgy, and ministry, is richly diverse: “we hear them speaking in our own tongues” (2:11). And though that Gospel goes forth in the Spirit’s power “to renew the face of the earth” (Responsorial Psalm), the Spirit’s power is a gentle power that refreshes the “arid,” bends the “rigid,” and warms the “frigid” (to translate the Sequence literally!)

By contrasting “different/same” (three times in three lines) and “many/one” (twice in two lines), Paul challenges the Corinthians—and us—not merely to tolerate but to celebrate the Spirit’s manifold gifts in our unity of faith. The alternative Romans passage features a different contrast: Paul reminds us that we are to live “in the spirit,” not “in the flesh” (Romans 8:9). By contrasting “flesh” and “spirit,” however, Paul is not denigrating the “body” in favor of the “soul.” By “flesh,” Paul means what we today might call a purely “secular” approach to life, one that denies any importance or role to the spiritual, so that priorities, values, principles, and practical lifestyle choices are made apart from any consideration of our adoption by God in Christ. Paul’s “life in the spirit,” on the other hand, sees all of life—“sacred” and “secular”—as subject to our “Abba’s” guidance and the judgment of Christ’s Gospel.

Gospel A closes Easter Time by repeating the Sunday after Easter’s Gospel. The Spirit, who comes noisily in Acts, like a strong, driving wind, now comes quietly as a breath, Jesus’ breathing his recreating Spirit on the failed disciples, showing them his wounds (vulnera from which derives vulnerability, true love’s most poignant quality), then sending them—and us—forth to love as he loved: forgiving, reconciling. If mutual forgiveness abounds among us, we will live in and by Jesus’ Spirit and share that with the world. If, however, we “retain” the hurt caused by one another’s sins, with the inevitable resentment and grudge-bearing that follows, the community will truly be “bound,” turned in on itself—“self-referential,” as Pope Francis puts it—with nothing to say to the world beyond our securely locked doors. Gospel B presents the keeping of Jesus’ commandments and word (John 14:15, 23) not as a matter of legal coercion but of loving intimacy: “my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him” (14:23). Celebrating the presence of “the Advocate, the Holy Spirit” (14:26), Easter Time closes with Christ’s promise of the Spirit’s role in the disciples’ evolving grasp of truth: “he will teach you everything and remind you of all I told you” (14:26). Since the Spirit preserves the Church’s Magisterium, the pope and bishops in communion with him, from error in essential matters of faith and morals, Catholic faith does not admit of paralyzing doubt or “mixed-messaging” on such matters.

Monday, May 20, 2013
Seventh Week in Ordinary Time
Weekday
Optional Memorial of Saint Bernardine of Siena, Priest (1380–1444)
Sirach 1:1–10; Psalm 93; Mark 9:14–29
• Though compiled two hundred years before Christ, Sirach’s concerns should resonate with today’s religious educators—and parents.
Challenged by the “modernity” and materialism of an encroaching Greek culture, Sirach was determined both to preserve and pass on to a new generation Judaism’s covenantal relationship with the living God and the moral values flowing from such a relationship. For Sirach, as for us, scripture and tradition formed a twin inheritance. So today and Wednesday Sirach extols God’s wisdom and the discipline required to grasp it, portraying God’s wisdom in feminine imagery: light-bestowing, life-giving, springing forth from God’s word, lavished upon the world, permeating God’s works and-giving God’s creatures with God’s friendship. What worldly wealth can compare with that heritage, Sirach asks his age? And we should ask ourselves!

- What an appropriate Gospel to mark our return to Ordinary Time! Can’t we all identify with the disciples, feeling utterly powerless in the face of evil? To them—and us—Jesus proposes the invincible weapon of prayer, to which some translations of this Gospel add “and fasting.”

- Young Bernardine recruited friends to care for victims of the plague. Later, as the Franciscan “Apostle of the Holy Name,” he nursed with the medicine of peace a Church plagued by dissension.

Tuesday, May 21, 2013

Weekday
Optional Memorial of Saint Christopher Magellanes, Priest, and Companions, Martyrs (Mexican Revolution, 1927)
Sirach 2:1–11; Psalm 37; Mark 9:30–37
- In traditional monastic rites, today’s Sirach reading is proclaimed as a timely admonition for the beginning of novitiate, as prospective candidates for the vowed life of monastic conversion are clothed in the community’s habit and given their new religious name. Equally timely for us as we return to Ordinary Time and the daily living out of our baptismal vows, in our “habit,” i.e., the shining garment of new life bestowed on us, together with our Christian name, at our baptismal rebirth.
- Having just celebrated the paschal mystery of Jesus’ self-emptying love, how we should appreciate this reminder that following Jesus requires us to silence all disputes over rank and privilege. Instead, would-be disciples must embrace a soul-deep humility that sees Christ in all others, especially the little and lowly.
- The twenty-one diocesan priests and three laymen honored today laid down their lives when Mexico’s revolution fiercely persecuted the Church. The tragedy and heroism of that time lives on in Graham Greene’s inspiring novel, The Power and the Glory, and the film, For Greater Glory (Cristiada).

Wednesday, May 22, 2013

Weekday
Optional Memorial of Saint Rita of Cascia, Religious (1381–1457)
Sirach 4:11–19; Psalm 119; Mark 9:38–40
- God’s Wisdom is a life-giving mother, says Sirach, but “docility of spirit” is required of those who would make wisdom their treasure—or Jesus their Lord!
- Confronting a recurring dilemma for disciples in pluralistic societies like ours, Mark asks: what about those who call on Jesus’ name but do not “follow us” (Mark 9:38)? Jesus’ answer is so clear and concise, you’d think that after twenty-one centuries we’d “get it”: “Leave them alone” (39)!
- The frequency of Saint Rita’s statues in churches built by European immigrants suggests that her sad story of marital discord and domestic violence made her a more popular patron then than we care to remember now and perhaps more relevant today than we want to admit.

Thursday, May 23, 2013

Weekday
Sirach 5:1–8; Psalm 1; Mark 9:41–50
- The “secular” mindset equates “healthy and wealthy” with “wise.” Not Sirach! For this sage grown old in God’s friendship, neither health nor wealth provide reliable foundations on which to build the future, for neither endures. Nor indeed is any “future” guaranteed! Thus we’d best “delay not [our] conversion to the Lord” (Sirach 5:8). Conversion: “to turn.” Each of us needs to ask ourselves: turn from what?

- And this conversion involves our whole being: hand, foot, and eye, mastered for God, harnessed for witness. And the simplest expression of that witness—“a cup of water” (Mark 9:41)—brings its reward, just as leading the simplest soul astray merits punishment (42).
- Salt, signifying both Gospel wisdom and Christian witness, both seasons and preserves: “seasons” the world outside and “preserves” peace within the community (50).

Friday, May 24, 2013

Weekday
Sirach 6:5–17; Psalm 119; Mark 10:1–12
- Sirach began this week showing us the path to friendship with God. Today, Sirach presents perhaps the most beautiful—and practical—advice ever written regarding human friendship. Sirach’s warning about false and fickle friends and the description of the “ideal friend”—discrete and devoted, steadfast and trustworthy—should prompt a reality check (aka examination of conscience): what kind of friend am I?
- Jesus counters the real—Moses’ provisions for divorce—with the ideal: God’s marriage plan, a life-long union of self-sacrificing love.
- Yet all of us who hear this challenging teaching need to recall Jesus’ other teaching: Judge not!

Saturday, May 25, 2013

Weekday
Optional Memorial of Saint Bede the Venerable, Priest and Doctor of the Church (c. 673–735)
Optional Memorial of Saint Gregory VII, Pope (papacy: 1073–1085)
Optional Memorial of Saint Mary Magdalene de’Pazzi, Virgin (1566–1607)
Optional Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Sirach 17:1–15; Psalm 103; Mark 10:13–16
- Our first week with Sirach concludes with his portrait of the human person as God sees us: the crown of God’s creation, almost unlimited in potential, our “inventive hearts” (Sirach 17:5)—a beautiful image—open to reason, seeing God’s glory in his creation (7–8), yet relying on revelation, hearing God’s voice revealed in divine justice and judgments (10). Though Sirach asserts God’s “everlasting covenant” (10), he sees the days of our lives “limited” before we “return to earth again” (2). Two hundred years before Christ, the details of that everlasting covenant were hidden from Sirach’s eyes.
- But not from ours, if we are childlike enough to accept God’s kingdom!
- Underlining the Spirit’s manifold gifts in an evangelization that embraces all space and time are today’s array of personalities: the monkish scholar Bede, the fiery reformer Pope Gregory, the Carmelite mystic Mary Magdalene de’Pazzi. How uniquely God worked through each—across the span of a thousand years—to touch the lives of thousands. Pentecost bids us thank God for the believing community’s rich diversity, and not simply tolerate but celebrate many different gifts of our sometimes very different brothers and sisters. Since the Church has long applied Sirach’s feminine images of God’s wisdom to Our Lady, consider the Masses that, invoking some of her loveliest revelation—seasons the world outside and preserves its reward (41, 42).
- And this conversion involves our whole being: hand, foot, and eye, mastered for God, harnessed for witness. And the simplest expression of that witness—“a cup of water” (Mark 9:41)—brings its reward, just as leading the simplest soul astray merits punishment (42).
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