

## SHARING THE SPIRIT'S GIFTS: PENTECOST SUNDAY A

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A philosopher and writer named Jean-Paul Sartre wanted to explore the agony of people who feel stuck and trapped in their lives. He saw this as being hell on earth. So he wrote a play about hell and called it *No Exit*.

Three people arrive in hell. It consists of a living room with mirrors around its walls. There is no exit in the room, and there is no interval or intermission in the play. The three characters stay on the stage the whole time, since they can never leave the room and must stay together getting on one another's nerves. While they keep talking about the past, there is nothing they can do now to change it. As they remain locked in the room, the final line spoken is '*Let's go*'. But they don't go anywhere and they can't go anywhere, because they cannot change anything in the past or the present. All they have are mirrors that keep reminding them they are stuck and trapped in the past. It's sheer hell for them, but that's the way things are.

It's one thing to be locked in a room with no exit. It's another thing to lock yourself in a room because you believe that the world outside your door is hostile, and that if you leave your room you will be killed. In our First Reading today, this is the situation of the first followers of Jesus, his apostles. Ever since he was crucified they have retreated to a room and locked themselves in. They are so scared of those that killed Jesus and may come looking for them that there is no exit, no way out. They are trapped, and they feel they are in a kind of hell.

But there is an exit after all. The risen Jesus comes and stands among them and says to them: '*Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you [out].*' He also breathes upon them the Holy Spirit, '*the Lord and giver of life*'. When they breathe in the Spirit, they breathe in the Spirit's gifts of courage, confidence, and conviction. The Spirit's gifts change their darkness into light, their sadness into joy, and their fears into freedom. The Spirit empowers them to give fresh meaning to the past and to look to the future with fresh hope. So the Spirit, in fact, is their *exit* from their feelings of frustration and hopelessness, and their *exit* from the room itself into a brand new life of generous and loving service.

So they walk out bravely into the streets outside the Upper Room. There they find hundreds and even thousands of people. There are Parthians, Medes and Elamites, visitors from Rome, Crete and Arabia, etc,etc., and all waiting to hear the message from the Apostles. So, filled with the Holy Spirit of wisdom, understanding, courage, confidence and love, the preachers begin telling all and sundry the good news about Jesus. Wonder of wonders, every person there hears in their own language the marvellous things that God has been doing in the person and life of Jesus!

Here in our gathering today that same powerful Pentecost Spirit of God is in our midst. Every one of us is a human being, and every one of us is a baptised Christian, a follower of Jesus. We share that much together. But none of us in this space now is exactly the same as any other person. Thank God for that! Hell is where everybody is the same and in the same boat. No! There is a variety of people here, and the Holy Spirit has distributed a variety of gifts among us. And that same Spirit of God, as St Paul insists in our Second Reading, is *'working in all sorts of different ways in different people'*. Our task is first of all, then, to identify, recognise and respect, just what gifts the Holy Spirit has given us, and just what gifts the Holy Spirit has given to other people in our lives.

What are your outstanding gifts and what are theirs? Is it a loving, joyful, and peaceful heart? Is it patience, kindness, friendliness, or generosity? Is it a willingness to forgive the hurt and harm someone has done to us, to let go of the past and move on? Is it loyalty? Is it fidelity? Is it an ability to organise? Is it an ability to teach? Is it skill in reading, writing, or speaking? Is it expertise with figures, statistics, and accounts? Is it shopping for the family? Is it cooking? Is it catering? Is it sewing, cleaning, or gardening? Is it simply answering the phone or the doorbell particularly politely? Is it sport, drawing, painting, music, singing, dancing, taking photos? Is it telling jokes and making others laugh? Is it welcoming strangers and making them feel at home? Is it making friends? Is it comforting the sorrowful, seeing and acknowledging the good in others, looking at the bright side of life, or starting helpful conversations? Is it visiting poor, sick, or lonely people? Is it giving food, money, or other material assistance to needy people here or overseas? Is it being ready to drive a neighbour to the station or the hospital, or take a *'shut-in'* person to church or an outing?

The great thing about the special gifts that the Holy Spirit of God has given to you, to me, and to all others in our lives, is that they have not been given to **us**

just for our own satisfaction, enjoyment, and fulfilment. They have been given to us for the benefit, service, enrichment and joy of others. So our second task today is to re-dedicate and re-commit ourselves to serving others with whatever gifts have been given to us.

Therefore, before we say today *'Let's go'*, let us also give thanks to God for the huge variety of gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to us personally and individually, and to all the other people who make up our community. In the words of St Paul, may we thank God that *'there is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people...'*! And let us put our thanks for those gifts into our Eucharistic Prayer today!

Only after we have given thanks to God today for all the rich gifts that the Holy Spirit has distributed among us, can we all go out to proclaim the good news of Jesus, and keep serving the Lord in all the others who come into our lives!