

COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY, MAY 15, 2005
(Pentecost Sunday – Mass During the Day)
(Acts 2:1-11; Ps 104; 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23)

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Pious Jews in the Second Temple period (after the Babylonian Exile ended in 539 B.C., up to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D.) expected the final age of salvation, when God's presence would be manifest everywhere. This would result in a new creation, for God's Spirit would again be active, as it had in creation (Gen 1:2; Ps 104:30). This desire for God's Spirit to be poured out, from humble origins in Num 11:29, when Moses expressed the wish that everyone, and not just some leaders, would have Yahweh's Spirit, was prophesied by Joel 3 [2:28-32 in some Bibles]. This is what now takes place on Pentecost, the culmination of the Jewish celebration of salvation which began with Passover, and which took place fifty days later. The promised Spirit came down on the Church and made everyone "prophecy" (speak the things of God effectively). Now Simon Peter, the leader of the nascent Church, proclaims (not included in our reading here) that this age of salvation so long awaited has finally arrived with Jesus' eschatological Exodus (Luke 9:31, in Greek), the Paschal mystery, which finally brings the outpouring of the Spirit. Peter in fact quotes the prophecy from Joel, simply adding the commentary "in the last days."

Unlike Luke, who, as has been previously said, prefers gradualness, John's gospel concentrates events by going to their essence, making them take place more immediately. Thus, when Jesus dies on the cross, it is then that he "hands over" the Spirit (John 19:30). It is this *delivered* Spirit which is then *received* by the disciples on the same day as the resurrection. Note that receipt of the Spirit is but one aspect of a holistic, unitary salvation-event; another aspect is forgiveness of sins, as reflected in our reading (cf. Acts 15:8-11). And as Jesus had the Spirit (John 1:33) and was sent, so he now sends the Spirit-filled disciples into the world (see also John 17:17-21). The unity created by the Spirit is reflected in the second reading.