

COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY, MAY 21, 2006
(Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year B)
(Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; Ps 98; 1 John 4:7-10; John 15:9-17)

by Dr. Emilio G. Chávez,
St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, Boynton Beach, Florida

What the pious of Israel waited and hoped for was God's coming to earth, the definitive theophany when God would save his people. Ezek 37:20-28 speaks of God dwelling with his people; Jer 31:31-34 says that everyone will know Yahweh ("to know" is a verb denoting great intimacy, as in Hos 2:21-22; Luke 1:34 Greek); cf. Isa 11:1-9. In our first reading, fulfilling Joel's prophecy (see Acts 2:14-21), God's salvation comes to the first Gentiles (= non-Jews, pagans, the "nations," as opposed to the "people" Israel). Cornelius, the centurion, need no longer treat Peter the Jew with such obeisance (recall the centurion who dared not ask Jesus to enter his home in Matt 8:8; Luke 7:6). God, through his Spirit "democratically" poured out (cf. Num 11:26-30), has made the Gentiles equal to the Jews (see Acts 15:7-11), bringing all who have faith in Jesus into intimacy with him (see Gal 3:23-29). It is the Holy Spirit which purifies our hearts (a type of circumcision, Col 2:11), and this new creation is manifested by speaking in tongues and praising God (see Gal 3:1-5). This universal (one might say "catholic") knowledge of God is what our psalm celebrates.

The second reading focuses on the essence of our relation to God and others, of God's will: that we love. This is the proof that we are children of God (tied to having the Holy Spirit, Rom 8:14-17) who truly *know* God. In this, God had taken the initiative (cf. Luke 15:20; Phil 3:12; Rom 5:8-10; 15:7). The gospel reading continues what was read last week, this time focusing on the commandment of love, understood according to Jesus' example, to the point of giving our life. This constitutes real *knowledge* of God, and indicates that we have passed from the "servile fear" (a favorite expression of Catherine of Siena) of the slave (who is not a child) to being true children of God (see Rom 8:15; cf. 1 John 4:18). This casting out of fear by freely loving others (which socially is a huge task in this world, but which is the only thing that can truly free us and give us real joy) is very important in times when so many live cowering in fear.