

June 3, 2012

Pentecost

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

The Apostle Paul, commenting on the structure of Redemption, proclaimed that when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, that he might redeem those under the Law, that we might receive sonship. And because we are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying "Abba," "Father" (Galatians 4:4-6).

Not least among the striking features of this proclamation is the apostle's use of exactly the same verb to speak of the sending forth of both the Son and the Holy Spirit. In each case he says, *exsapesteilen ho Theos*---"God sent forth his Son. . . . God sent forth the Spirit of his Son." This is a summary of how we know God: We know him because he has revealed himself by his sending forth of His Son and Holy Spirit.

This text of Galatians speaks of the sending of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit as two realities subject to distinction. In distinguishing them, Holy Scripture justifies our investigating each of them in distinctive (though not separate nor separable) ways. Let us, then, speak of each distinctly.

We may begin where the Bible does, with God's revelation through his Son. How should we describe this revelation? Two adjectives that come to mind are empirical and historical.

The Johannine literature, most particularly, emphasizes the empirical quality of the Incarnation; it is visual, auditory, and tactile (John 4:14; 9:37; 1 John 1:1-3).

The historical emphasis on the Incarnation marks the opening of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the defining truth of the historical order is the truth revealed in the Son "in the last of these days"---*ep' heschatou ton hemeron touton*---"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to our fathers through the prophets, has in the last of these days, spoken to us by a Son, whom he has appointed heir of everything." God's final revelation in his Son is inseparable from history, the experience of before and after.

This theme appears, likewise, in the Parable on the Vine Growers, where, "last of all, [God] sent his beloved son," who is declared to be (as in Hebrews) the "heir" of history (Mark 12:6-7).

In the revelation in his Son, God transforms the reliability of the empirical, historical, categorical order, and all of God's speaking in history is determined by, and to be interpreted with reference to, his revelation in the Son. From the very first time that he uttered a human word, God started to become incarnate. By speaking this word in history, God transforms the knowable structure and content of history.

With respect to the second "sending"---God's revelation to us in the Holy Spirit--Holy Scripture again speaks of the transformation of man's cognitive powers. Thus, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship, by whom we cry out 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself bears joint witness to our spirit that we are children of God" (8:15f.; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 1 Corinthians 2:9-13).

We observe in the Romans text that the two aspects of knowledge are as distinct as the Son and Holy Spirit who convey them, but they are no more separable than the Son and Holy Spirit. Though the Holy Spirit blows where he wills, he is not a free-floating spirit. He is the "Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19; cf. Rom. 8:9). His true presence can be discerned precisely by what he causes us to know, and prompts us to affirm---with respect to the Son and to the Father who sent that Son. Namely, "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3), and "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

These are the two essential affirmations of the Holy Spirit. This Anointing, poured out on the Church at Pentecost, has relatively little to say of himself. He affirms, rather, "there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him" (1 Cor. 8:6).

The Holy Spirit thus points the believer in two directions: toward the earthly, empirical, external realm of historical activity, where Jesus Christ "was delivered up for our offenses and was raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25), and toward the inner and eternal realm of transcendent mystery, where the Father abides in the unapproachable light.

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