

# HOMILETICS

by

**Bernard J. LeFrois, S.V.D.**

## I. BIBLICAL NOTES FOR HOMILIES

### FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

(May 1, 1977)

**First Reading:** Acts 13: 14.43-52  
**Second Reading:** Revelation 7: 9.14b-17  
**Gospel Reading:** Jn. 10: 27-30

**First Reading:** Paul and Barnabas, on their first missionary journey in Asia Minor, experience at first great success in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. Both Jew and Gentile (pagans) listen eagerly. So great is the following of the pagan world, that it arouses the jealousy of the Jews, who soon violently oppose the missionaries, and eventually drive them away. This same procedure repeats itself in the following towns, and it becomes the occasion of Paul's turning more and more to the Gentile world, which in time became his universal mission. In obedience to the Master's injunction (Mt. 10:14), they shake off the dust from their feet, a symbolic gesture disavowing any further responsibility in the conversion of those in question. Luke contrasts the eagerness of the pagans to receive the Good News with the machinations of the Jews to oppose it.

**Gospel Reading:** A short passage but one replete with deep theological content: 1) Those who belong to Christ gladly listen to his voice and follow him, that is, conform their lives to his. 2) He in turn knows them, that is, he lovingly cares for all their needs that they reach their goal. 3) The pasture land to which he is leading them is not merely a temporal one, but life that never ends, with death and all its concomitants completely conquered. 4) No one can oppose him in this, not even all the powers of hell, for the flock is the Father's gift to him, and no one can take them from his "hand" (care), which is identical with that of the Father, because 5) he and the Father are one, not only in mind and will and action, but in the very Oneness of divine Being.

**Second Reading:** In content, this passage resembles that of today's gospel, but already fulfilled. The Shepherd is now the victorious Lamb, and the flock is now the huge crowd of redeemed humanity, portrayed as victors around the Lamb and the throne (of the Father). They have conquered all evil by continually purifying themselves in the Lamb's Blood (his sacrificial death) that is, by means of their continued sharing in his Paschal Mystery. Now they enjoy the eternal loving care of the Father, and the Lamb shares with them all the blessing of his Spirit (the springs of Living Water). Earth's miseries are over. Divine life is now theirs forever.

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

(May 8, 1977)

**First Reading:** Acts 14: 20b-26 (Gr. 21-27)

**Second Reading:** Revelation 21: 1-5a

**Gospel Reading:** Jn. 13: 31-33a. 34-35

**First Reading:** On their return trip of their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas visited the communities they had founded, and made it very clear that in the plan of God, suffering and trials were part of their Christian calling. They also set up in each community a definite organized body, by appointing religious leaders. Since the Eucharist with liturgical prayer was the backbone of the Christian community from the very outset (see 2:42), it is only reasonable to suppose that these religious leaders were ordained ministers to preside over those functions. Any wise organizer would do the same. (To state that Luke is here anticipating a later institution is a gratuitous assertion). On returning to the mother church, they report their great success in the Gentile (pagan) world, with humble recognition of the divine source of their success.

**Gospel Reading:** At the last supper, once Judas is no longer present, Jesus unbosoms his inmost sentiments: 1) the theme of glory: God's glory is a manifestation of his Being. For God's People of old, it was chiefly in his power and majesty. But in Jesus it is chiefly God's immense love. The love of Christ is most forcefully manifested by his sufferings and death for mankind, which simultaneously manifests the love of the Father. In turn, the Father will manifest his love for the Son by the far-reaching effects of the resurrection and the exaltation at the Father's right, mighty and godlike beyond all estimation. 2) the theme of separation: made necessary for a while by his death. Jesus announces it most tenderly, using the term "children" (teknia), an expression found

in John's Gospel only here. 3) The theme of fraternal love: it returns over and over again in these farewell discourses, a last will and testament, as it were. The disciples are to imitate to the full his own love for them, heroic to the extreme, coming to expression by his life of utter service and total self-sacrifice. Such love would reveal the genuine disciple, as it revealed on the part of Jesus the true Being of God. Though love was enjoined on God's People of old, it is now new, both in its ideal (Jesus) and in its extent (universal).

**Second Reading:** God's end-kingdom in its glorious fulfillment. Entire creation is transformed, befitting regenerated humanity. All hostile forces (symbolized by the violent and raging waters of the sea) are put out of the way. New Jerusalem, the glorified People of God, shining bright in holiness, is now the Bride of Christ forever. In Christ, God and man are united in an everlasting nuptial bliss. All the evils of this mortal life have completely vanished forever. Joy, peace and the love of the Spirit reign for endless ages.

### **SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER** **(May 15, 1977)**

**First Reading:** Acts 15: 1-2.22-29

**Second Reading:** Revelation 21: 10-14.22-23

**Gospel Reading:** Jn. 14: 23-29

**First Reading:** Paul was convinced that Christ's sacrifice of himself was all-sufficient for man's salvation, be they Jew or pagan. While the moral Law was perfected by his Coming (Mt. 5:17), the many laws regarding ceremonial worship, food restrictions, circumcision and a host of other legalities were meant to prepare men for his Coming (Gal. 4:23f), but were abrogated by his death and resurrection (Col. 2:16f; Hb. 8:10; 9:10). But some convert Jews began insisting on circumcision as a requisite for the convert pagan's salvation. Paul and Barnabas strenuously opposed this, and the matter was relayed to Jerusalem. There, the authorities in the Christian community decided the matter and an apostolic letter was sent to Antioch. Notice how the Apostles are fully convinced they act under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Paul and Barnabas are fully vindicated in their views. Christ's salvific work is all sufficient for salvation, provided it is accepted by the individual. However, the pagan converts were requested to abstain from certain usages which were offensive to Jewish sensi-

tivity, living as they were in a mixed community. Three of the points regard abstinence from certain foods, and the last pertains to sexual unions within certain degrees of kinship, which was quite prevalent among the pagans. It was a local ordinance intended for the provinces of Asia Minor mentioned in the letter.

**Gospel Reading:** A passage full of theological import: 1) While awaiting Christ's glorious return, sincere lovers of him will observe his instructions, and thus be blessed with the stupendous gift of the divine indwelling involving a most intimate enjoyment of the Blessed Trinity, the Father giving them his Love (the Spirit), who together with Father and Son come to take up permanent abode in the heart. For lack of faith and obedience to Christ's message, worldlings will not enjoy it. 2) Christ's message of Good News is the Father's will for all men. Nothing more beneficial can be imagined. 3) Though Christ's mission is about to end, he promises the gift of the Paraclete, the Helper, who is sent in his name, that is, he will make known who Jesus really is (the name) and the fullness of his revealed message. 4) Shalom-peace is not merely the parting Oriental farewell phrase, but it is transformed by Jesus into a parting gift of himself (for he is our Peace: Eph. 2:14), a gift fraught with all possible blessings of peace, harmony and love. 5) If their love for Jesus is selfless, they will not grieve over his departure, but rejoice with him, for his mission is about to climax in glorification and exaltation. 6) Although Father and Son are one in Being (10:30), the Father is the supreme goal of Jesus life, and the source from which he proceeded. To do his will in the work of salvation is his whole ambition. His whole being is a going to the Father. In this sense the Father is greater. 7) Fulfillment of his words will corroborate his divine knowledge and be an added proof of his mission.

**Second Reading:** A dazzling vision of the glorified People of God, the New Jerusalem, transfigured by the very glory of God, glittering like diamonds as was the throne of God in 4:3. Square is the Greek symbol of perfection as is the number twelve for the Semite, hence representing both the Greek and the Jewish world. Those who dwell in the New Jerusalem are symbolized by the representative names of Israel's twelve tribes and the Lamb's twelve apostles, thus combining into one the entire regenerated humanity of old and new covenants. Angelic guardians complete the picture. The temple which indicated God's presence to the People of old, gives way to the Reality and the Presence of God himself and the Lamb, in the glory of the beatific vision. Created light is now superfluous, for God is Light itself, beamed through the Triumphant Lamb of God. What hope this vision inspires!

**SOLEMNITY OF THE LORD'S ASCENSION****(May 22, 1977)**

**First Reading:** Acts 1: 1-11  
**Second Reading:** Ephesians 1: 17-23  
**Gospel Reading:** Luke 24: 46-53

**First Reading:** The period after the resurrection was of great importance for the chosen band. Jesus continued to give them proofs of his being alive, so that they would be staunch witnesses of that fact. He also concentrated on the special preparation needed for their role in the believing community where God would reign. Furthermore, he impressed upon them the importance of the Spirit, the promised Gift of the Father, in which they would be invested (baptized). "Forty days" is a symbolic number used by Luke as often in the Old Testament for a definite period of preparation for a specific work, as, for example, Moses receiving divine instructions on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:18).

Jesus also corrects their idea of a temporal kingdom and an imminent Parousia. At first there lay before them the gigantic task of bearing witness to all nations on the earth, something they could only perform properly when endowed with the Spirit. In describing the Ascension, Luke is emphasizing the parting of the Lord's visible presence. His manner of describing it belongs to his literary techniques as author, to drive home his point. Both Luke and John in their gospel accounts give the impression that Easter and Ascension took place on the same day, but that is a theological perspective. Here in the Acts, Luke's perspective is symbolic and may be connected with the end of the forty days when Moses received the Law, while the forty days after the resurrection are in preparation for the New Law of Love which is the gift of the Spirit.

**Gospel Reading:** In giving his last injunction to his chosen ones, the Lord 1) reminds them that his passion and death were foretold, and thus were in the plan of God for man's salvation, 2) he sends them out in his name and authority, with a message of reconciliation coupled with a call for penance for sin. 3) He orders them to begin with the chosen people at Jerusalem, but not before they were invested with the Father's Promise, the mighty Spirit, by whom they would be enabled to be his staunch witnesses.

The Lord's last gesture was one of priestly blessing (see Sir. 50:20). Then he was taken from them visibly. Luke projects all this on the day of the resurrection from his theological perspective, so

that he can end his gospel in Jerusalem where it began, namely, in the temple, where God dwelt with men. Only now it is the spiritual Temple, the Lord Jesus, in whom all continue to praise the Father. Their final act is one of adoration of him in whom they now believe, and of joy, in accordance with the word of Jesus in Jn. 14:28, and in acceptance of their noble mission.

**Second Reading:** Paul's prayer for his Christians is intimately bound up with the Father, the Son and the gifts of the Spirit. Its object is that they clearly know God (wisdom) and appreciate his work in them (insight). Such insight involves a better understanding of their calling, a fuller appreciation of the riches of their inheritance, and a deeper grasp of God's power working within them. That power is identical with the power at work in Christ's resurrection, his exaltation at God's right hand, making him superior to every possible created being, giving him universal dominion, and thus supremely exalted, constituting him Head of the Church. Thus the future of the Christian is inconceivably great.

The Church is both the Body of Christ and his fullness. The word "fullness" in all five passages where it occurs in the captivity letters is used to signify with great emphasis the concentration of the sanctifying power of God (Cerfaux). This has been concentrated in Christ, God's primordial sacrament for man's salvation, and he in turn concentrated it in his Body-person, the Church, which as his extension on earth is likewise the fundamental sacrament which communicates Christ to men (by various sacramental rites). God is the fullness which lives in Christ, and eventually will replenish regenerated redeemed humanity (Rev. 21:22-24).

## PENTECOST SUNDAY

(May 29, 1977)

**First Reading:** Acts 2: 1-11

**Second Reading:** First Corinthians 12: 3b-7.12-13

**Gospel Reading:** John 20: 19-23

**First Reading:** Pentecost in Israel was a harvest festival (Ex. 23:16). Thus it symbolized fulfillment, and from that aspect St. Luke depicts the outpouring of the Spirit, for it is the fulfillment of the salvific work of Jesus. It was celebrated seven weeks or fifty days after Passover, and hence was called pentecosté, the Greek word for fifty. Fifty was the sacred number of the jubilee year, which signalled the remission of all debts and a new start

for the People of God (Lev. 25:8). It is these theological dimensions of Pentecost that Luke is presenting rather than any stress on chronology, for Pentecost, the fulfillment of Christ's Paschal Mystery, is when the believing community came alive with the life of the Spirit of Christ.

The Promised Gift is that of the invisible Spirit of God himself (v. 4) who is communicated to all present. Clearly to be distinguished from this divine Gift is the visible and ostensible manifestation of his Presence in the charism of tongues poured out on those present. In this scene, the object of the charism of tongues is the public praise and the extolling of God for his marvelous deeds (v. 11), above all for the Paschal Mystery of the Savior, the fruit of which is the gift of the Spirit. Luke is also possibly giving us an idealized picture of the Early Church, comprising events that happened over a longer period of time. The essential message is that the Spirit of God is the great Gift of the Father and the Son for the final age.

By the power of this Spirit, the Apostles are endowed from on high to proclaim everywhere (with tongues of fire!) to all nations the mighty salvific work of God. Luke's "table of nations" is a selection of peoples of the then known Mediterranean world, symbolizing all nations united in the one community of Christ by and in his Spirit, the Bond of union and love. Thus the events at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11) are reversed. Salvation is universal, for all nations, but gained by belonging to the New People of God.

Wind, fire, tongues (for speech) all symbolize the Spirit. In both Hebrew and Greek, spirit and wind are identical terms (ruach, pneuma), though Luke uses a slightly different word here, yet from the same root. John the Baptizer foretold that Jesus would immerse his followers in Spirit and fire (Lk. 3:16). Tongues, coming from a central source, indicate that one and the same divine Spirit is imparted to all, to speak the new language of the Spirit to the world, the message of love concerning Christ and his universal salvific work, to which the Spirit bears witness.

**Gospel Reading:** Since the outpouring of the Spirit climaxes the entire salvific work of Jesus or his Paschal Mystery, John wishes to portray this close connection between the giving of the Spirit and the resurrection-event before bringing his gospel-account to a close (originally ch. 20). It is not the time element that John is indicating but a theological dimension (which differs from Luke's in Acts ch. 2). In order that the Apostles (that is, those sent, from the Greek word "apostello", to send) carry out the identical mission that Jesus received from the Father, he breathes into them the Spirit (symbolized by the breath of Jesus), so that they in turn as

other Christs continue his work of transforming the world by cleansing it from sin, and re-creating it in the Spirit (see Gen. 2:1). Since the mandate of Christ is both to forgive and to retain sin, the duty incumbent on the ministers of Christ is to judge the sins of the believers. But one cannot judge without the believers making known their sins, or confessing them.

**Second Reading:** A passage rich in content. Paul writes to the Corinthian community which experienced the abundance of the Spirit's charismatic outpouring. Yet he makes that the primary activity of the indwelling Spirit is to enable the Christian to confess the divinity and sovereignty of Jesus (12:3). Only then does he mention the gifts of the Spirit (which include here various ministries and functions). Moreover, it is the same identical Spirit at work in everyone, imparting his gifts to the individual members as he pleases, but all for the benefit of the whole body (v. 7). Comparing the Body of Christ with the human body, Paul shows the necessity of variety of functions. That all should have the same function is against the very notion of an organized body. So also in the Body of Christ, each member contributes in his own way and by means of his particular gift to the good of the whole community. What one member accomplishes affects all the others.

The reality of our incorporation into the Body-Person of Christ is clearly asserted by authors today. "Baptism incorporates the Christian into the risen, glorified Body of Christ, so that the Church is the manifestation and extension of the Lord's Body in this world. Its members share in the life of the Risen Lord" (Jerome Bibl. Comm.). Paul can speak of "drinking of the Spirit" since Jesus referred to the Spirit as the "Living Water" (Jn. 4:10; 7:38f).

## II. HOMILIES

### FLORES DE MAYO

(For the month of May)

It is a beautiful and meaningful custom to bring flowers to the shrine of our Blessed Mother during the month of May which is devoted to her special honor. What may seem puerile to the sophisticated is a custom of deep significance and worthy of every child of God. What son is not pleased when honor is done to his mother? And is the Son of Mary less pleased when his brothers and sisters honor their Mother and his?