

## **First Reading — Pentecost, Holy Trinity, Corpus Christi : Year B, 2021**

For these great feasts, which act as a bridge between Easter Season and our return to Ordinary Time, the first reading includes passages from the Acts of the Apostles plus two readings from the Pentateuch (the Jewish Torah or Law), namely from the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy.

The first reading for each of the feasts reflects an aspect of God's revelation to humanity, either to the apostles and those to whom they preached the Word, or to the Israelites who followed Moses out of Egypt.

### *Main Themes for the Feasts*

We can think of these feasts as further aspects of the revelation of God among us, complementing what is already revealed to us in the feasts of Christmas, Epiphany, Holy Week and the Ascension. Here the focus is on the mission given to the disciples and the infant Church community, and the nature of God's continuing presence among those who follow Jesus and go out to be witnesses in his name.

The feast of Pentecost is one of great drama and energy: the Spirit of God fills the universe and almost consumes the apostles, signifying the birth of the Church and the salvation for all in Jesus Christ.

We can see the Most Holy Trinity as the feast that celebrates the 'face' with which God is actually revealed to us; not God as remote or from heights far beyond us but God living amongst us. It is Jesus himself who revealed the Father to us and who promised us the Holy Spirit as a continuing support and advocate for each person who turns to God.

Like the feast of the Holy Trinity, the feast of The Body and Blood of Christ, Corpus Christi, challenges us to understand the mystery of Jesus' living presence among us. In this feast we celebrate and give thanks that, through consuming the Eucharist, our own bodies become intimately connected to the risen Christ and can thus be lifted up with him to divine life.

### **Pentecost Sunday, Acts of the Apostles 2:1–11**

When the Twelve met at Pentecost—ie. on the Jewish feast of Weeks held 50 days after Passover and associated with the revelation of God and the giving of the Law on Sinai—Luke tells us that they were 'all filled with the Holy Spirit' and began to speak in tongues. After this, the 'marvels of God' were preached in many languages.

### **The Most Holy Trinity, Deuteronomy 4:32–34, 39–40**

Moses chronicles the mighty deeds of the God who created humankind and guided the Israelites through many ordeals, to demonstrate to them that their god is not one among many gods but is the one true God, the Lord God in heaven and on earth. For our part we must keep his laws and the commandments given through Moses on Mt Horeb (Mt Sinai).

### **The Body and Blood of Christ, Exodus 24:3–8**

Moses gathers all twelve tribes of Israel for the Covenant meal. He leads them in offering 'communion sacrifices' to the Lord, to seal in blood their commitment and their obedience to the laws in the Book of the Covenant that the Lord gave them through Moses.

### *Background to the Readings*

The *Acts of the Apostles* is regarded as the second volume of Luke's gospel, the story of the early Church that follows on from Luke's account of Jesus' ministry. Scholars believe it was written between 80 and 90 A.D. The author is unknown but scripture scholars believe he was neither Jewish nor Palestinian but an educated Greek-speaker who was not an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry. At least a third of *Acts* consists of speeches put on the lips of Paul, Peter and Stephen, probably reflecting early apostolic preaching. The book's main themes are: Jesus' life, death and resurrection fulfil the Scriptures; Jesus is the new David, the risen Lord of the Christian community; and the Church must become 'a light to the nations'.

The book of *Deuteronomy* is the fifth of the five books of the Torah. Deuteronomy is organised as a series of addresses by Moses to the people of Israel. The book includes the death of Moses and the commissioning of Joshua as the next leader. Its great theme is that God has saved the people whom God loves; the people are to remember this, and love and obey God as covenant people. Deuteronomic theology and perspective had an influence well beyond this book, and shaped the development of early Judaism with its focus on observance of the Law as the way of life for God's people. Authorship remains a mystery to scholars, many of whom favour a date in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

The book of *Exodus* is the second of the five books of Moses known as the Torah, the Pentateuch or the Law. It tells the story of how God delivered the people from Egypt, and the freedom they gained from the covenant relationship they sealed with God in the Ten Commandments given on Mount Sinai. It continues the story of Israel's journey with God begun in *Genesis*. *Exodus* is an anthology of liturgy and literature from nearly all periods of Israel's history, possibly reaching its final form in the exilic period (6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.).

### *Further Reading*

Raymond E Brown S.S., *Christ in the Gospels of the Liturgical Year*. Chapters 27–32: A Once-and-Coming Christ at Pentecost. Liturgical Press

Harold A Buetow, *Thirst for Life*, Meditations/homilies for the Weekdays of the Year, Vol 1, St Mark. (notes on the Pentateuch). St Paul's

Harold A Buetow, *The New Out of the Old*, Meditations/homilies for the Weekdays of the Year, Vol 2, St Matthew. (notes on Exodus, Deuteronomy). St Paul's

David N Freedman (ed.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*.

Dennis Hamm S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles*. Vol 5, New Testament, New Collegeville Bible Commentary. Liturgical Press

J Edward Owens, *Deuteronomy*. Vol 6, Old Testament, New Collegeville Bible Commentary. Liturgical Press

John J Pilch, *The Cultural World of the Prophets*. The First Reading, Year by Year. Year B. Liturgical Press

Mark S Smith, *Exodus*. Vol 3, Old Testament, New Collegeville Bible Commentary. Liturgical Press