

Homily – 6th Sunday of Easter – Catechetical Conference

Acts,8,8..17/I Peter,3,15-18/John,14,15-21

Brothers, sisters

‘You know the Spirit .. abides with you .. will be with you.’ This is more than a theological statement. It happens and is experienced when people gather in circumstances like this conference. For the disciples, at first it was a promise. They would know the Spirit as a teacher who helps understand things. He would be experienced as a dweller who is not distant nor stranger but familiar and intimate. The spirit would be known as an advocate, speaking on their behalf when they fall short, when they need a defender. For us people of this century, the promise is helpful if we have become disheartened or skeptical. It may come as a reassurance if we feel a need to be strengthened or re-oriented. The Spirit of the Lord will be with us forever, opening minds, warming hearts of people who search for meaning and for hope. On the road to Emmaus, after sharing their frustration and their disappointment with the new companion, the disciples were taught about a new look at Scriptures. At first they had not realized that they were being changed inside, that their hearts were warmed. Obviously the Spirit had been at work within them.

Samaria, at the time of Jesus, was probably the last place where people expected to believe, to repent and to be baptized. It is strange enough that according to the Acts (first reading) Philip had told them about Jesus. He may have done so while fleeing Jerusalem where things had been rather rough for Christian believers. In the eyes of many people, our world today is Samaria. Some people feel that nothing good can come out of a corrupt society like ours. Greed, consumerism, lust, domineering and other hot things seem to dominate. On closer look we might find that God chose such an environment to come to the world and to heal people, cast our devils and give hope. Many people in this society are at work to bring healing, enabling others to join a community and to become active citizens and healers in turn. This conference has opened our eyes to a culture that is indeed restless. We have had to look differently at the way people get along. We have also become somewhat critical of political, economic and religious institutions. On the other hand we have become aware that people wield real power to change things that have gone wrong. We have also discovered that shifts in social and family patterns of life are not all negative. We realize that people still have a taste for life, for love and for hope. We may be looking in all directions to quench this thirst but it is there indeed and it is something expressed in extreme ways. Our society demands transparency and does not always get it. It needs permanency and stability while fashions come and go, while new electronic gadgets quickly replace even recent ones. Above all, in the words of Saint Peter, as we have heard in the first reading, people expect those who believe to make an accounting for the hope that is in them. People expect us to show signs that our lives have been transfigured, made new and bright, enlightened by the Spirit of the risen Christ. We may take this as a burden or see it as a challenge and an opportunity, a grace from heaven.

With all the challenges that our Church encounters we do not feel strong or well equipped. We do have competent and dedicated pastoral workers; we have a strong mission from the Lord. But this treasure we carry in clay vessels. The message is greater than we are; we feel this all the time. Our trust is in the risen Lord and on the promise he made to be with us till the end of times with His Spirit. Throughout this conference we are blessed with a sense of unity and solidarity in mission. This also is a gift of the Spirit. As we join in the Eucharist, we are aware that the death and resurrection of Christ are very much at work in us and in the Church. Our eyes are open to God’s Word and we are transfigured. The Spirit of the Lord renews the face of the earth.

+ *André Richard, c.s.c.* – May 29th, 2011