

RESURRECTION GIFTS



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*'Make me a channel of Your peace
Where there is hatred,
let me bring Your love,
Where there is injury,
Your pardon, Lord
And where there is doubt,
true faith in you.'*



BRIEF EXPLANATION OF 'PRAYING SCRIPTURE'.

(Hints for Personal prayer, Adoration time, Prayer groups, private or small retreats, group reflections etc)

Introduction.

The Church's Vatican 2 General Counsel's object was to rejuvenate the Pilgrim Church on its journeying through the Modern World. It reemphasised the fundamental truths that 'God loves us first', that each one is called into a deepening, conscious relationship with Jesus Christ and into responding to the guidance of God's Spirit, leading us all into unity. Emphasising that what we see God doing in Scripture tells us what He is doing, here and now, among us. So the Council encouraged that the practice of prayerful 'listening' to the Spirit in the Scriptures (*Lectio Divina*) flow out from mostly only Religious Communities to all convinced Christians. A great teacher in Spirituality helped us missionaries develop it further. In developing and sharing with groups of mostly new Christians in our Missionary work in Japan I found it very fruitful. It is also becoming quite fruitful here in Ireland.

I had spent much time talking *to* God. But this 'pondering the Word of God' changed my prayer towards more of an 'interaction'; it provided space, patience and openness to 'listen', to hear and be moved inwardly. So 'Praying Scripture' means the help that a text of Scripture gives towards this personal conversation with God. Remember, that

what we see God doing in the Scriptures in the past, is telling us what He is doing, here and now, among us! So beyond our talking to God this helps us to ‘listen’. We ‘listen’ by noticing movements in the heart and mind. Examples; A word in the text may hold my attention and as I dwell on it I notice things in a new way or, pulled by imagination deeper into the scene, I may taste feelings of those in it. It can cause memories of experiences to arise. Gradually I will find myself talking to the GOD I MET in my EXPERIENCE. So, noticing movements in my heart and mind become my listening. Later I reflect further on them. Yes, the Holy Spirit is at work. And this builds up a personal relationship. Remember in this process, *waiting* – with openness – is an important pose. Scripture study can add to the pondering, but basically the text alone is all that is needed for ‘Praying Scripture.’

Here are a series of ‘*GUIDED MEDITATIONS*’ that I used with groups. They are examples of what can happen in a ‘praying Scripture’ period. But remember much is based on MY experience. So please be careful to understand that these are only examples of what one might meet. They give reassurance that, if you find them coming into your pondering, you are not being distracted by memories or imaginations about the event but being led on to recognise God acting in YOUR OWN life. YOU take out of your ponderings what vibes with YOUR experience and build on that. Think of this input as ‘hints’, ‘a demonstration’, a ‘springboard.’ Gradually you will find different and deeper

insights from yourself or from others but hopefully these examples of mine help you to begin a fruitful ‘praying Scripture’.

I recommend first reading the whole planned text. Then gazing attentively at it, allow the Spirit to lead you here and there! In your planned length of pondering time you may be held on a certain word or part of the text. Stay here as long as held. Then, when you feel drawn, continue the text till stopped again. Even after times of having used the whole text one can feel drawn back to it again and again – each time it can provide further noticing. These ‘Guided Meditations’ are examples of my pondering. Find what moves you.

After your ‘Silent praying period’ a short reflection or thinking time might help you clarify what you experienced in the silent time. Asking yourself a question such as, ‘*Did I see anything in a new way?*’ or, ‘*Was my heart moved in a new way?*’ might help. This can help your noticing when repeating pondering a text. Sharing experiences with another also helps. Repeating pondering the same text gives added fruit - or going back to one before. But you will learn more by doing. Just ‘try and see’ – with a certain perseverance!

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APPEARANCE TO MARY OF MAGDALA

JOHN 20: 11-18

Preparation.

I decide a time period. Then attentively gazing at this text, I wait, open to promptings of the Spirit. I allow my imagination to bring me into the scene and also let relevant words and experiences move my heart and discover what God is saying to me here and now.

The appearance to Mary of Magdala. *(John 20: 11-18)*
Meanwhile Mary stayed outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, still weeping, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away' she replied 'and I don't know where they have put him.' As she said this she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognise him. Jesus said, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him'. Jesus said, 'Mary!' She knew him then and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni!' - which means Master. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go and find the brothers, and tell them I am ascending to

my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ So Mary of Magdala went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had said these things to her.

From Darkness

As I gaze at the text I find myself observing the scene. I feel compassion for the weeping Mary outside the tomb. I see her as having spent since Friday a nightmarish, confined ‘Sabbath-Rest’. Now, at Sunday’s first-light she hurries to the tomb of the crucified Jesus. She is in despair. She has lost everything. The future – a big black hole! Before the other spice-embalming women arrive, she has hurried alone to the tomb to mourn. Memories of Jesus – what he was, what he did, what hopes he gave – might ease some of the shock and despair in her heart? But now she is further stunned! She discovers the tomb desecrated! She rushes back to tell Peter and John. They have out-run her to the tomb.

Jesus Appears!

By the time the frantic but exhausted Mary arrives back at the tomb they have departed. Crushed, weeping, she approaches, stoops down and peers inside. Her grief clouds her awareness of the strangeness of two figures being there. They ask, *‘Woman why are you weeping?’* Mary can only heart-breakingly sob, *‘They have taken my Lord away and I don’t know where they have put him’*. But turning around *‘she saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognise him’*. Jesus feels her crushed despair. He feels her yearning

to search for the dead Jesus. He too asks, ***‘Who are you looking for?’*** Then gently, he speaks her name – in the same way as he has always done. ***‘Jesus said, “Mary!”*** It hits her like a bolt of lightning! This is Jesus himself! He, the same – but different! Ecstatically overwhelmed she throws herself at him crying, ***‘Master’***. Jesus feels her heart ready to explode with awe and joy. He has to say ***‘Do not cling to me’***. She gradually calms down, staring fixedly at Jesus as he says, ‘the ***‘hour’***, meaning, the phase of his ***‘death, resurrection, and return to the Father’*** has not yet been completed. ***‘I have not yet ascended to the Father.’*** A new and deeper relationship has now begun!

The Message and the Messenger

Then, Jesus gives her the message, ***‘Go and find the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’***. Now I imagined Mary with this overflowing heart rushing off to share with the mind-shattered, scattering disciples this awesome, exciting news and message. Jesus is telling:- ‘It is a new me! I will be alongside the Heavenly Father. But I will be bringing you and others into an even closer relationship’. It is not just ‘as disciples’, not even just ‘as friends’ but as ***‘brothers and sisters!’*** Of course, it will take time for them to accept, with wonder, implications of this message. ***And for me also to hear and respond to this message!*** Have I – and so many others – not also been slow in more fully grasping the message? Much more pondering-and-praying time is needed.

Mary and Women Messengers

Pondering on why was Mary Magdalene the first messenger of the Resurrection (Peter and John were at the tomb before Jesus appeared to Mary!) has made me more aware of how much spiritual help I have received through women as Spiritual Directors, Retreat Guides and through those in faith-sharing groups. The spiritual-help groups, sharing both struggling and joyous experiences, deepened my own awareness of God ‘working’ among us. Pondering this deepens the conviction about the necessary preparation and contribution – spiritual and practical – women also must make in fruitful preparation for and during the coming Synodal meeting of the Universal Church in 2023.

Sharing Resurrection Experiences

In the time I spent praying-pondering this I have gradually recognised some experiences in my own life as ‘Resurrection Appearances’ of that Loving Jesus to me.

* As a bewildered, feeling very inadequate, young missionary hearing an older missionary in conversation speak with such animation about the Resurrection I realised that in my life I had invested much more time pondering and praying the Passion than the Resurrection! Thus, while receiving much spiritual nourishment from the Passion I had failed to get much from the Resurrection and, as our friend pointed out, it was the *centre* of everything! That day he planted a big seed!

* Then came Vatican 2. The insights and understandings deepened by the Council gave us great help in further enlivening our Faith and bringing it to meet ‘the *modern world*’. Of course, it demanded much study, seminars, talks and much prayer by us missionaries for understanding how central was the Resurrection and openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It also reminded us that ‘Christianity is much more than just a teaching, *it is a Person!*’ and that Faith was not just knowledge but an increasing relationship with the Blessed Trinity. (We changed our notices and practices for Faith Instruction to ‘Introducing Christ’.)

* Also, a vastly experienced teacher of Spirituality greatly helped develop our prayer-life through improving our ‘*Finding God in Events of our every-day lives*’, in our ‘*Praying with Nature*’ and of course in ‘*Praying Scripture*’. With seminars, ‘Directed Retreats’, coaching in ‘Spiritual Sharing and Direction’, our study and catechetics were advancing hand-in-hand with our praying and spirituality. Yes, a long drawn-out ‘*Resurrection experience*’! It opened more minds and hearts to ‘journey with us’.

*In this Scripture text this is what the Spirit
emphasized for me.*

But what is it emphasizing for you?

Be still now and allow your heart to talk with Jesus

ROAD TO EMMAUS APPEARANCE

Luke 24: 13-27

Lord Jesus, through pondering and praying time
on this Scripture text may I be
brought closer to your heart.

Luke 24: 13-27 – That very same day, two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. Now as they talked this over, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side: but something prevented them from recognising him. He said to them, ‘What matters are you discussing as you walk along?’ They stopped short, their faces downcast. Then one of them, called Cleophas, answered him, ‘You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days’. ‘What things?’ he asked. ‘All about Jesus of Nazareth’ they answered ‘who proved he was a great prophet by the things he said and did in the sight of God and of the whole people: and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early

morning, and when they did not find the body, they came back to tell us that they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.'

Then he said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?' Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.

Journeying with ...

Pondering this text my imagination brings me into this scene. It is forenoon, two days after the Crucifixion and the hurried entombment of Jesus. The 'Passover' Sabbath-Rest is over. I see two figures slowly trudging out of the city on the seven miles to Emmaus, their home village. They move along dejectedly, sadly conversing. They are still horrified, dismayed and now despairing. Another figure moving more briskly overtakes and joins them. I know it is Jesus but they do not! I listen-in to the conversation. I hear the new traveller sympathetically ask, '***What matters are you discussing as you walk along?***' This shocks them. Does this stranger not know the central topic that has been occupying everyone in Jerusalem for this last three days?! Do they have to tell him '***all about Jesus of Nazareth?***' I hear the sadness,

bewilderment and despair in their voices as they recount how *'great a prophet he was by the things he said and did in the sight of God and of the whole people'* and *'our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free.'* (They are imagining a conquering 'Promised Messiah'). And to make it even worse it was, *'our chief priests and our leaders'* who *'handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified.'* Jesus hears the pain, incomprehension, despair and, yes, even a little fear and anger in their voices. He listens closely as they empty their hearts.

Jesus opens hearts to new understanding

Then I hear the stranger (Jesus) say, *'You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets!'* He now points out and explains to them how the many prophecies that refer to the coming Saviour have now been fulfilled in this Sacrifice on Calvary and thus *'Christ would enter his glory'*. They listen in growing awe – and increasing regret that they had been blind and missed so much! They are now struggling to grasp some acceptance of the depth of the 'dead' Jesus' love. They are beginning to accept the complete self-giving of the crucified Jesus in his love to conquer the 'Sin of the world' in hearts. The 'stranger's' passionate explanation is lengthy but, providentially, so was the journey. At its end, *'they pressed him to stay with them'*. They want so much to prolong and continue the conversation. Their hearts now are *'burning'* with awe and thanks.

Praying is a Conversation – Aware that good Listening is so Important!

This Resurrection apparition shows that ‘Prayer is a *conversation* with God!’ That means in it I too must also listen! A favourite question of a person who helped our growth in praying was ‘*Are you listening?*’ To improve my listening in praying I often try practising *equal time* – time for asking and time for listening to God. In this, after pouring out my ‘needs’ and recognising my ‘dependence’, I would force myself to empty out thoughts and doggedly WAIT till the end of my planned praying-time to ‘hear’. At times I might even have to wait till the next – or even more – prayer time. The answer to my listening would then come in *noticing* e.g. ‘Good Things’ such as something causing thanks, or a new way of seeing things, or a new desire or such. (As this prayer habit develops, it is not surprising to find things to be thankful for first popping up into awareness at the start before ‘needs’ are faced.) But our ‘needs’ and ‘negatives’ will also appear. By ‘negatives’ I mean things like recognising resistance in myself to ‘letting go and *trusting*’, or shortcomings in my heart towards others, or a blind overconfidence in myself or such. In these I would be *hearing* God ‘speaking’ to me inviting me to be changed. Dwelling on ‘good things’ – no matter how small – would be strengthening my heart to let God change my negatives. I discovered that, in talking about a serious subject in a difficult foreign language, I needed at times to say, ‘Stop, is this what you are trying to tell me?’ I would repeat as best as I could

what I thought I heard. The response would either be ‘Yes’ but with more helpful details or else a more enlightening correction. But both experiences would result in better hearing and deeper closeness. In my praying I am finding that after asking this question, ‘What are you trying to tell me?’ and waiting is helping understanding God’s promptings and closeness to Him.

This is what the Scripture has emphasised for me.

But what is it emphasising for you?

Be still now and allow your heart to talk with Jesus

A Help: Sharing one’s growing *awareness* with another – or others – even by ‘phone or e-mail, can be quite fruitful.

EMMAUS MEAL

Luke 24: 28-35

Luke 24: 28-35. *When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them. 'It is nearly evening' they said 'and the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?'*

They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, 'Yes, it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.

My Pondering the Text

Now the two 'running away' disciples, having talked and listened to the 'Stranger' (Jesus) on the road have arrived at Emmaus. ***'He made as if to go on but they pressed him to stay with them'***. More than culture dictating this offer I see it

as their *'burning hearts'* want more and more of this amazing stranger's company. But as he *'took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them'* he becomes their host! *'And their eyes were opened and they recognised him.* Such a shock! But as they stare at him open-mouthed, Jesus vanishes! It dawns on them it had been the same Jesus as before death, though different in many ways! I picture them at first sitting stunned, silent and struggling to comprehend the reality of Jesus' being still alive, soul-touching and present to them. Next awe, excitement and gratitude flood their hearts. And *'..that instant'* emphasises their immediate urge to rush back to Jerusalem – that long journey! – to share this exciting discovery with the lost, despairing followers they had left.

Sharing on the road

As they go, even as they rush along, I listen to their excited conversation. I watch them at times sharing different emotions. Then at times I see them lapse back into silence and awe as they try to grasp that here is the Jesus who surrendered to that most terrible death, now with them! And so alive! They even share again on the amazing patience, compassion and generosity that Jesus showed them on the journey – to them who they now feel had been poor followers! Their hearts, now burning with thanks are conscious of how deeply Jesus has touched them. It increases their urging desire to share this unthinkably wonderful news with the other poor dejected disciples and followers!

Meeting the others

But when they arrive there is more delight for themselves too! The followers are already rejoicing at more ‘Good News’ of Jesus’ Resurrection! They are told *‘Yes, it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon!’* So the two travellers now add their own experience to the group’s wonder and joy. Jesus’ gift to these two travellers’ hearts is now touching many hearts! I imagine the others in awe quizzing them for a long time. The travellers’ experience covered so much more than Peter’s report. It is easier to imagine so many wanting to ask them so many different questions.

Reflection

‘..how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.’

These last words alert me to Luke emphasising how important the Eucharist (Thanksgiving) – the *‘Breaking of the Bread’* – will be for the new Christian Community. (We will also see this so prominent in his follow-up book, ‘Acts of the Apostles’.)

Our own Praying and pondering this text can lead to deeper participation in the Eucharist. It can lead to an ever deepening journeying with Jesus in his Passion, Resurrection and sharing of God’s Spirit. Also this draws our hearts to be more like Jesus’ heart. Gratitude (*Eucharistia*) keeps growing and drawing towards sharing and unity.

A Sharing, ‘What is God doing here?’

An experience of many years ago in my missionary parish influenced me very much. Preparing to offer Sunday Mass and

reflecting on my sermon I entered our usually quiet and orderly sacristy. But that morning I was met by scattered questions and problems from Scripture readers, from choir leader, even the servers' organiser. It was distracting, I felt so flustered! Suddenly I was inspired. I went over to a corner, faced the wall and decided that for a minute I would ask, 'But what is God – more than me or us – doing, here, now?' and wait for God to lead me in what was most important for us all. In that short time I was quickly calmed down. Key-thoughts rose into my mind. I became more aware of God's presence and action that would encase our gathering. I was especially struck by His giving Himself, touching our hearts, changing them to act more like His. I remember spending much time in the following weeks pondering, praying and deepening this experience. Like the two disciples, I was driven to share it when talking about the Eucharist. I focused on the compassionate and forgiving heart of Jesus 'feeding the hungry in the desert', 'dining with sinners', performing the lowly servant's welcoming job of 'washing the disciples feet'! So 'What is God doing here now?' has helped so much in my preparing before Mass. It helps praying, "Lord, draw my – and all here – hearts to feel and act more like Yours." It helps deepen my thanksgiving and desire to share,

This is what this Scripture has emphasised for me.

But what is it saying to You?

Be still now and allow your heart to talk with Jesus

APPEARANCE to 11 DISCIPLES

John 20: 19-23

John 20: 19-23 – *In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, ‘Peace be with you, and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.’ After saying this he breathed on them and said: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained’.*

Risen Jesus Appears to the 11 Disciples.

My imagination leads me into the scene. During the confining ‘Sabbath-Rest’ the disciples have scrambled into hiding ***‘for fear of the Jews’***. Their spirit is crushed. After seeing what had been done to Jesus they have become so afraid. Also moments of guilt now gnaw at them. Dark despair reigns! Frightenly, suddenly Jesus appears among them! They gasp in shock. For a moment they fear. Guilt almost causes them to scramble and flee. But the Apparition speaks. It says warmly, ***‘Peace be with you!’*** It is Jesus’ voice, the voice that they had heard so often and so gently to so many needy people! And they now notice wounds in his hands and in his

side! Realisation does come! It IS him! Not just a spirit! Now awe overcomes them. They are overwhelmed. And there is no reproach! Just compassion and encouragement! They realise, ‘Jesus is even forgiving us!’

The Sending – With the Spirit.

And Jesus says again, ‘*Peace be with you.*’ Their hearts are now filled with great warmth. Then He says, ‘*As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.*’ Another great shock! They can’t believe their ears! They are to continue the journey! Jesus is handing over the human role of spreading the ‘Reign of God on earth’ to *them*! This is unthinkable. ‘Not to us?’ they want to shout. ‘*We failed You!*’ And this is a much deeper call than what they had earlier responded to! ‘Surely we are not trustworthy – even if we had the ability!’ But Jesus, by again emphasising his gift of ‘*Peace*’ is emphasising that he has forgiven them and is offering them a trusting dependence on God’s unseen presence. It will be there assisting in the difficult, even perilous journey ahead. Their hearts will grow in TRUST with an ever-supporting conviction of HOPE! But now as Jesus is showing his wounds He is reminding them (and us) of the cost that self-giving love will entail! He is foretelling that “There will be many times when opposition, persecution, incomprehension, failure and suffering will envelop you. But in your praying hearts, awareness of my Risen Presence, now with the Father, and Our continually sending the Spirit of love and guidance will give you new life on your journey. Yes, you

will be spreading the ‘Reign of God.’” Then Jesus, *‘After saying this he breathed on them and said; “Receive the Holy Spirit”*.’ This tells them – and us – that from heaven, with the Father, the Risen Jesus will continue guiding the Mission through the power of the Spirit! Don’t be afraid, TRUST!

Praying about God’s Love, Forgiveness and Drawing us Together.

Pondering this I realise that to me it is full of surprises. Firstly I watch the Risen Jesus causing amazement in those who believed Him dead. Then as they accept His Resurrection and forgiveness for their desertion He calls them to become the leaders of the ‘People of God’! I spend much time trying to imagine the emotions flooding their hearts from these experiences. But more surprise holds me when at this amazing time of spreading the ‘Good News’, Jesus emphasises *‘forgiveness’* of one another. It leads me into much time pondering ‘forgiveness’. It suddenly strikes me that genuine Love is needed for real forgiveness. It is pure unearned gift, a giving of oneself! And that is why I can understand the reception of God’s Spirit being highlighted at this time. It is because we are receiving God’s love that we are able to forgive. It is allowing God’s love to work in us and through us to make us One! My mind is being opened to its importance! Adverting to the fact that it is as central in the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ as receiving **‘our daily bread’** helps me! And remembering Jesus, in the midst of His most terrible suffering, giving the example of praying for *‘forgiveness’* for

those responsible also helps! So for setting out on this journey of passing-on the ‘Good News,’ prayer and preparation for receiving Pentecost is necessary! Openness to the Spirit will increase our *thankfulness* and *trust*. It will allow God to work *through us* to ‘bring out the best’ in others. Each one will be led closer to God by contributing their ‘widow’s mite’ to God’s Saving Plan. However openness to God’s urging is fighting in us against inner urges of self-sufficiency, self-esteem, being-in-control and such, all nourished by the ‘Sin of World. And forgiveness is extra difficult as when injured, the driving urge to retaliate can be felt as an urge to protect oneself from further injury or such. Human instinct regards forgiveness as a loss. But growing awareness of being loved and constantly forgiven by God, helps God work through us towards helping others. The accepting and granting of forgiveness not only renews a relationship but deepens it – especially with God!

* I am reminded of an older missionary telling us in language school that when we start explaining the Faith the hardest part would be ‘*forgiveness*’. ‘That is the *watershed*.’ he said. And so we discovered it to be!

*The Spirit emphasized this for me.
But what is the Spirit emphasizing for you?*

Be still now and allow your heart to talk with Jesus

APPEARANCE to THOMAS

John 20: 24- 28

John 20: 24-28 – *Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord', he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe'. Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas. 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him: 'You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'*

Absent, Disbelieving, Crushed Thomas

Probably, like many, I was unthinkingly critical of Thomas. Now I see deeper. Moreover I receive much from pondering this. It first brings me back to his time travelling with Jesus and the other disciples. He witnessed Jesus' deep compassion, warmth and patience towards all 'needy' – be it physical, mental, emotional, spiritual or even antagonistic. Jesus, in his actions and praying times showed such closeness to God! And

‘power went out from him’. His enemies could not best him. Thomas had gone with him into a very hostile area and Jesus had triumphed. (John 11:16) So until the Crucifixion I imagine Thomas growing in believing that this Jesus fitted the picture of the *Promised Messiah* so wonderfully – even more wonderfully than David’s existence promised! I picture Thomas, even waiting during the trial, waiting for a very triumphal emergence by Jesus from this latest harassment. But then an unbelievable shock! As he sees everything collapsing his fright grows! Now the enemies triumph in every way! Not only the Religious Authorities and the Roman rulers but even people that had recently cheered Jesus, now shouted for his death! Jesus was now shamed, tortured, crucified, abandoned – and buried by the city dump! So Jesus was NOT God’s Promised Messiah! In horror, bewildered and in despair, Thomas had fled. He was completely crushed!

Thomas comes among the Apostles

Next I see the shattered, lonely, fearful Thomas searching for companionship and help. Reluctantly he finally re-joins the other disciples. But he is annoyed to hear them professing, ‘*We have seen the Lord*’. They seem thankful, joyful though unsure what to do. Thomas is not prepared to go off in trust again! He rejects the possibility of a real Resurrection of Jesus. He strongly proclaims that a vision, even showing wounds, would not convince him! He would want to physically ‘feel the flesh’ before he would be even tempted to reconsider. I see the other disciples uncertain about how to relate to Thomas in this

condition. I decide that they are, with sympathy and patience, feeling drawn to a united, concentrated prayer for him.

But still there is a feeling of awkwardness and caution. Also I notice that in times when Thomas hears that John plans to bring Jesus' Mother to visit them, Thomas slips away early to a lonely place. He feels so much sympathy for Mary. He would be so embarrassed to meet her. The others talk about her wonderful, peaceful, gracious, helpful support.* Thomas is ashamed he is not able to share their belief or joy. I see him slipping away to spend hours in a lonely nook in the hills, staring at the distant Temple. He yearns and cries to the God of Israel to comfort and strengthen His people with new hope of a Real, Liberating Messiah.

*Christian tradition has always held that the Resurrected Jesus had first appeared to his mother, Mary.

Jesus Appears Again!

But after some days wait Jesus does appear among them again. I pause to consider that Jesus had not rushed immediately to Thomas – and the eleven. Is it telling me that openness to receive might require time to grow? But Jesus comes again bringing a feeling of God's special presence and peace. He turns to Thomas. *'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe'*. I see Thomas stupefied. The invitation to put his hand into Jesus' side is scary. This is no mirage or

disciples' wishful dreaming! He hears the familiar warm voice, notices even more the painful wounds. Especially he feels the patience and encouragement that is coming from the heart of Jesus. Now Thomas is overcome. He suddenly realises that instead of reproach, Jesus has come and surrendered Himself to Thomas' conditions! Jesus has humbled himself to make it easier for Thomas who is now in tears. (He no longer needs to touch Jesus!) How patient Jesus has been – not to mention his *forgiving!* Thomas is so humbled. Yet he feels so loved! Words of Jesus during their earlier 'journeying together' become real! Thomas feels he is now a *lost sheep* rescued by this relentlessly searching Good Shepherd! He experiences the Prodigal Son's loving welcome from the *father!* His awe continues to grow. Memories of sayings by Jesus invade his mind. The sentence, *'I and the Father are one'* (John 10:30) rushes in, stimulating a deep belief. Awe invades him. On his knees, he gasps *'My Lord, and my God!'* The others are gazing in stunned awe. But Jesus has disappeared again! Still watching, I see in them too an increasing awe, excitement and thanks. They think of all the despairing former followers scattered around. With Thomas in the centre, all gather into deep, sustained Prayer of thanks and for the Spirit's help in reaching the other scattered followers.

Reflection

God does not appear to us like the Risen Jesus does to Thomas. But in patient, attentive prayer times do we not experience new ways of understanding something? It causes

relief, strength and gratitude. It keeps repeating even if there is resistance. It is causing another good change in the heart. We are being drawn to 'let go' our impulse to control and instead to TRUST more. The words, 'Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe' come into mind. I ask Thomas to help me be more aware of my need to be forgiven in different ways and to accept it with deepening thankfulness.

*This is what I find this Scripture saying to me now.
But what is the Spirit in your heart saying to You?*

Be still now and allow your heart to talk with Jesus

FISHERS OF PEOPLE

John 21: 1-14

Note: Because of being led into much to ponder and pray about in this ‘Lakeside Apparition’ (John 21: 1- 19) I am dividing it into two reflections. Here, ‘*FISHERS of PEOPLE*’ is the first part.

John 21: 1-14. Later on, Jesus showed himself again to the disciples. It was by the Sea of Tiberias, and it happened like this: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two more of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said, ‘I’m going fishing’. They replied, ‘We’ll come with you’. They went out and got into the boat but caught nothing that night.

It was light by now and there stood Jesus on the shore, though the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. Jesus called out, ‘Have you caught anything, friends?’ And when they answered, ‘No,’ he said, ‘Throw the net out to starboard and you’ll find something’. So they dropped the net, and there were so many fish that they could not haul it in. The disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord’. At these words ‘It is the Lord’, Simon Peter, who had practically nothing on, wrapped his cloak round him and jumped into the water. The other disciples came on in the boat, towing the net and the

fish; they were only about a hundred yards from land.

As soon as they came ashore they saw that there was some bread there, and a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it. Jesus said, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught'. Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore, full of big fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them; and in spite of there being so many the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast'. None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, 'Who are you?'; they knew quite well it was the Lord. Jesus then stepped forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and the same with the fish. This was the third time that Jesus showed himself to the disciples after rising from the dead.

'..but caught nothing'

I imagine the Apostles in that 'upper room'. From being a 'hide-out' it has become a place of 'Religious Retreat' – a place of silence, of praying, pondering and deep sharing. Instead of fear, guilt, despair the two Apparitions of Jesus have filled their minds and hearts with awe, gratitude and budding trust in mystery. But the Mission Jesus has promised to entrust to them is so unthinkable – sending them out to found the 'People of God' in the wide world! In their deep praying they are begging for more apparitions and some kind of release. I wonder was it seeking a 'breathing space' in something that Peter felt confident in doing that caused him to declare ***'I'm going fishing'***? Six others readily join him.

Now I watch as their long, strenuous, frustrating night of repeatedly casting nets is ending. They have *'caught nothing'*! Now so disappointed and weary, they have given-up and are heading ashore.

Open to hear God's prompting gives the fruit.

Next, I picture a half-hearted response to the prompting of this kind stranger – and then its fantastic result! Next comes the realisation to John and Peter, *'It is the Lord'*! Their hearts are now bursting with relief, happiness and thanks. Like a loving child Peter shows his feelings with his dash ashore to greet Jesus. Around Jesus everything is so welcoming. A warm meal already prepared; *'bread there, and a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it'*. They are invited to add to the meal.

Reflection

I see this influencing their future response to God's promptings in their coming role of gathering and guiding the Lord's flock. I understand why Jesus also describes them as 'fishermen'. They are to gatherer 'followers of the Risen Jesus.' I ponder more. Fishermen do not sow fish to harvest them. The fish are a complete gift of God! Jesus will remind the 'gatherers' that they are God's agents listening to the promptings of God to bring together others into the 'fold'. And I now understand better the 'cloistered' time of prayer, reflection and sharing habit as an ever-deepening relationship to God. It is the foundation for these Spreaders of the 'Reign

of God'. And the measurement of relationship is growth in TRUST.

Growth in Relationship and Mealtime

My thoughts are brought back to Luke 5: 1-11. It was after the 'Preacher' persuaded the doubting fishermen to 'launch out' and start fishing and were overcome by the 'miraculous' catch of fish that they '*left everything and followed him*'. And on their journeying with Jesus till Calvary how important for them was 'meal-time together'. It was beyond just physical energy renewing. A growth in heart-to-heart uniting was always building up. And Jesus would have time for short one-to-one conversations as well as nourishing their heart-to-heart community growth. '*Bring some of the fish..*' now points to their contribution. It is now going to increase their awareness to the most important question, '*Do you love me?*' After this they will go back to their 'cloister' to deepen further this growth and prepare for enlivenment by the Holy Spirit.

Pondering and Sharing.

As a young missionary in a modern, deeply-cultured, very-developed, prosperous, non-Christian nation, I experienced what benefits the 60 years ago, Vatican 2 Universal Church Council, gave to our own personal development and to our missionary sharing. It also emphasised recognising the Church facing into every culture and answering the constantly changing outlook of each

‘Present-day World’! Also history shows at times, the Church becoming less conscious of its deep neediness and dependence on God by over-emphasising laws. (Laws are only to foster the exercise of *values*.) Thus, they must not substitute observing laws for *awareness* of a personal need of growing relationship with the heart of Christ, the Father and the Spirit. Francis, the present ‘Peter’ has called for a Universal Church praying, dialoguing, and group-listening to the Holy Spirit in a Council for 2023. For its preparation we are all called to pray, dialogue, discern at local level to contribute to the representation and fruitful participation of the Universal Church. It will emphasise each one being called into a growing awareness of relation to this loving Christ, ‘the Gatherer’, the ‘Good Shepherd’. who with the Father and Spirit will lead to saving everyone by making us One!

*The Spirit emphasized this for me here.
But what is the Spirit emphasizing for you?*

Be still now and allow your heart to talk with Jesus

PETER, DO YOU LOVE ME?

John 21: 15-19

John 21: 15-19 *After the meal Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?’ He answered, ‘Yes lord, you know I love you’. Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs’. A second time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ He replied, ‘Yes, Lord, you know I love you’. Jesus said to him, ‘Look after my sheep’. Then he said to him a third time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was upset that he asked him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and said, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know I love you’. Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep’.*

‘I tell you most solemnly, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt around you and take you where you would rather not go.’ In these words he indicated the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God. After this he said, ‘Follow me’.

‘Do you love me?’

I try to imagine the shock Peter got when Jesus suddenly asked him, **‘do you love me more than these others do?’** His courtyard denial – over which he has grieved so deeply while accepting Jesus’ full forgiveness – has created a humbling

diffidence. But he is staunchly convinced of his increased love for Jesus. Now he is baffled at Jesus asking him three times! I wonder did Jesus, by drawing out the three acknowledgements wish to draw out Peter's own awareness of the importance of love in following and serving God? At the same time I see Jesus entrusting care of his 'Lambs' and his 'Sheep' to Peter! Here, Peter is being affirmed as leader of disciples and followers in drawing others into a relationship with Jesus. The symbols of shepherd and fisherman will show the relationship Peter and disciples will have with all those followers. They, like fishermen, will go out finding and gathering others into recognising and following the heart, mind and love of Jesus, the 'Good Shepard'. They, as 'shepherds' – *with continually increasing love in their hearts* – will gather, nourish, protect, lead, unite and value their flocks – even so much as to die to protect them! And the Evangelist later is adding how Peter, in faithful fulfilment of this task, by *accepting* his own crucifixion '*would give glory to God*'.

Pondering 'Love'.

Pondering this emphasis on 'love' reminds me of a comment I found very useful in pondering and discussing religion, spirituality and faith. It was 'God puts in everyone's heart two seeds: the first is seeking to be loved, the second is seeking to love! Growth in the first relentlessly urges growth in the second.' Experience verified this. We come to realise that, for fulfilment, to love is essential! Looking back we can now see

our own experiences of this, beginning with first, a mother's love, then father and family's care and love reaching into wider circles and communities. But our growth in accepting being loved grows in urging our giving love! Growth in thankfulness, trustfulness, openness, compassion, courage, generosity, patience and such gives growth in loving. But at the same time on this 'journey' we carry in us the opposition of many, strong inclinations to self-centeredness, 'to be in control', self-sufficient and such. And these are reinforced by being bombarded by the 'Sin of the World'. We also realise that, despite having some similar feelings, 'love' is basically different from 'like'! ('Like' is self-centred; ie, 'something is good for ME'). 'Love' is 'other-centred': it is good 'for the OTHER'!

Reflection.

Revelation has magnified these understandings; first in the Old Testament and then with the coming of Jesus into this world. Here, *praying* Scripture has helped deepen our realisation of the awe-inspiring gift of Jesus coming among us, especially giving himself on Calvary and now in Resurrection. We grasp more deeply His returning love for the Father and their sharing that love with us. That changes our hearts and sends us out to spread it with others towards unity. It is establishing the 'Reign of God'.

GOD LOVES US FIRST!

This makes us realise that the No 1 truth of Christianity is, 'GOD LOVES US! And it is from this that we get the desire

and the strength for No 2, 'WE MUST LOVE GOD AND OUR NEIGHBOUR.' But because so much seems to be continually going wrong, it requires deliberately making effort and time to notice God working in our lives. It is out of this growing gratitude and wonder – not out of an imposed service or fear – that we get the desire and the strength to love and serve God and neighbour. But this growth requires a growing habit of prayer for a growing awareness of our relationship to God. It means a 'letting go', a growth of handing one-self over with TRUST. What we are taught comes ALIVE through experience *pondered* on!

WE MESSENGERS

So one very important thing is that we messengers in our efforts to spread the 'Message' must not make a quick jump to preaching '*we must love*' and '*how to serve*' God, before helping develop awareness of *GOD LOVING US FIRST*. Also remember: 'Example communicates'! Reflection points out that if the 'messengers' themselves had not experienced shock, despair, fear, loneliness, guilt, and then such wonderful forgiveness and deep love, could they really share the Message of these things to others who at times also experience these calamities in their lives? So our 'Disciple's calling' will include also experiencing times like these on their journey of sharing the 'Good News'. But this gives a growing, close relationship to God that will help us continually grow *in TRUST!* In myself I find a growing question to Jesus, 'What do You want to do through me in *MY* 'small world?'

St Therese of Liseux, a Doctor of the Church and Patroness of the Missions, in her short, enclosed life, living with others and praying especially for missionaries, in her biography helps us. She gives examples of her own being able to love annoying, selfish, demanding others with patience, compassion and stamina. Realising this was something beyond her own nature and heart, she recognised it was the GIFT of God's love into her own heart that was empowering her to love others.

This is what the Spirit emphasized for me in this text.

But what is the Spirit emphasizing for you?

Be still now and allow your heart to talk with Jesus

ASCENSION TO HEAVEN

Luke 24: 45-53

Luke 24: 45-53: He then opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said to them, 'So you see how it is written that Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.

And now I am sending down to you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city then, until you are clothed with the power from on high.

Then he took them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. Now as he blessed them, he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven. They worshipped him and then went back to Jerusalem full of joy; and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

'He then opened their minds to understand the Scriptures'

In our Praying Scripture we have been seeing the astounding growth of belief and trust in the hearts and minds of the Disciples as they encounter Jesus in these Resurrection Appearances. It suddenly strikes me. Has it not given me and others, attentively praying these Appearances, a greater

awareness of Christ coming among us too, as a Saviour and concerned Friend? Learning so clearly of Christ's forgiveness and love for the failing disciples also deepens our awareness of His love for us. He patiently forgives our recognised failings and touches our hearts. This growth strengthens us to fulfil His desire that we forgive others. And we are included as spreaders of this desire of God that it *'be preached to all the nations'* – and not just by words but by example, coming from the heart. We are all called to being *'witnesses to this'*, everyone in their own world – that world of each one into which God has called each individual.

Again the Promise of, and preparation for, God's Spirit.

The disciples hear again that wonderful promise for the needed help and instruction in, *'I am sending down to you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city then, until you are clothed with the power from on high.'* Yes, they are to continue their preparatory Praying-time together! I imagine Mary and others now visiting and praying with them frequently. And these disciples too are present on this occasion and are present for the Ascension.

Blessing them Jesus is carried up to heaven.

This is a different ending to his appearances. It is not a sudden disappearance leaving them yearning for more of his visible presence. It is a gradual, lovingly-blessing ending for this form of presence. *'Then he took them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed*

them.' And *'as he blessed them, he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven'*. The fruit from this appearance is also very different. *'They worshipped him and then went back to Jerusalem full of joy.'* This shows their new understanding of who Jesus is. His mission on earth now completed, He will now be gloriously beside the Father, sending their Spirit of love on the world. This is the first time the word, *'worshipped'* is used! And Jesus does not depart leaving them longing for more presence. They depart, *'full of joy'* and return to Jerusalem.

They were continually in the Temple praising God.

This tells me that they were now quietly venturing out among people and gathering to pray in the *'Temple'*. Their Mission is to look to and move to *'the ends of the earth'*. But that Message will be the culmination of the Message first sown in Israel, now signified by the Temple. It is to be completed by the Spirit drawing them onwards and outwards. And here again it emphasises the importance of praying and praying-together.

REFLECTION.

Surprisingly my pondering brought me back in memory to the image of a certain picture of the Ascending Jesus. It was a big glory-filled, attractive picture. Yet the wounds were visible with light streaming from them. They said to the gazer, *'For love of you I suffered all.'* And that brought me back to very early in my missionary experience. A few years after Vatican 2 a family-relative visited me in Japan. She asked me

so many questions about my missionary life and work. She also commented quite often how impressed she was at the tidiness, orderliness, helpfulness, safety of Japan and made comparisons to our countries 'back home'. One day as I brought her to greet a fellow missionary I led her in through the front door of the church. A new, huge painting greeted us. In its background was a cross. But superimposed on the cross was an ascending, glorified Jesus showing the wounds in hands and feet. But the arms were extended downwards towards the watcher and from the wounds flowed streams of energising light! My friend behind me with awe and excitement, gasped loudly 'It's Him!' Calling my name and pointing she proclaimed 'that's the answer! It's Him!' meaning for me, the answer to so many of her missionary questions. Afterwards pondering I thought it was a more informing and positive message in that missionary country! I had heard non-Christian mothers, (usually numbering about 90%), of beginning-students at Catholic private schools talking about how their school-beginning children were frightened to see the sign of a 'cruelly tortured man' on the wall in every classroom. Now I would like to see the Resurrection and Gift bestowing pictures more common everywhere.

This is what the Spirit pointed out to me at this time.

But what is the Spirit emphasizing for you?

Be still now and allow your heart to talk with Jesus

AWAITING PENTECOST

Acts of Apostles 1:1-5

A Preparatory Prayer:

“Come Holy Spirit, deepen our hearts with you love.”

An Introductory Note.

Luke’s ‘**Acts of the Apostles**’ is a continuation of his **Gospel**. Luke’s Gospel ends with Jesus’ last instruction before the Ascension, ‘*And now I am sending down to you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city then, until you are clothed with the power from on high. .. and they were continually in the Temple praising God*’. (Luke 24: 49) And The Acts begin with repeating these *instructions* and *promise* in more detail.

Acts of Apostles (1:1-5) *In my earlier work, Theophilus, I dealt with everything Jesus had done and taught from the beginning until the day he gave his instructions to the apostles he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven. He had shown himself alive to them after his Passion by many demonstrations: for forty days he has continued to appear to them and tell them about the kingdom of God. When he had been at table with them, he had told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for what the Father had promised. ‘It is’ he had said ‘what you have heard me speak*

about: 'John baptised with water but you, not many days from now, will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'

(12-14) 'So from the Mount of Olives, as it is called, they went back to Jerusalem, a short distance away, no more than a sabbath walk; and when they reached the city they went to the upper room where they were staying; there were Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Jude son of James. All these joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.'

**'..continually in the Temple praising God' and
'..in continuous prayer'**

We cannot miss noticing how Luke, in both Books, as preparation for receiving the Holy Spirit, emphasises continual prayer, personally and together. And in the prayer the word **'wait!'** is stressed. It means waiting *with openness to receive*, with trust and, if needed, with patience. Luke also exhorts us to be conscious of significant understandings and experiences that we have already been made aware of in **'everything Jesus had done and taught from the beginning until the day he gave his instructions to the apostles he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven'**. Now in our prayers we are to wait, recognise what has been changed in us as we 'journeyed with Jesus', and let it be deepened. These meaningful experiences of our spiritual

journey till now will again touch our hearts and minds and deepen coming expectations. Yes, Jesus is telling us – and me! *‘to wait ..for what the Father has promised’.*

In their self-isolating, praying, waiting and bonding.

I try to imagine and experience the atmosphere and feelings of the Apostles (now again twelve.) I am in sympathy and awe with this tiny band now facing into the mighty resisting world without the physical, leading presence of Jesus. Their being called to lead the new ‘family of God’ against the ‘Sin of the World’ is overwhelming. Even knowing that the Risen Jesus, now beside the Heavenly Father above, will still be ‘present’ to them, the future is overpowering and daunting. But they are continuing to wait and to deepen their prayers, both personal and in groups. They are learning to *wait* – with *Trust!*

The Presence of Mary

Tradition says ‘Jesus had first appeared to his Mother’. It is impossible to imagine the joy, gratitude and love in that scene. But it emphasises the village-maiden’s openness and TRUST to the offered love of the Father, to her completely entrusting herself to the Holy Spirit, – even to following Jesus through the horror and mystery of the Crucifixion – and then experiencing this unspeakable happiness of being visited by her Resurrected Son; I can only wonder at it all. Mary and other women and disciples are now spending most of the time with the Apostles and disciples. Outside their praying times

Mary warmly talks with the disciples individually, listening and affirming. During their many times of deep prayer together, the others can feel Mary's praying from her own realisation of God the Fathers' love in choosing her, the Spirit's love for her in accepting to be Mother of Jesus, and her Son's love for his mother. With her motherly heart she is praying that the disciples can open their hearts to the Spirit and can spread the Heart of Jesus in the needy world. She prays that the disciples and all followers respond to the gift of being loved and led by the Spirit in TRUST. And it will help them accept 'crosses' in their everyday life as she did and follow in *dependence on* and *Trust* in God's omnipotence and love.

Sharing Experiences.

* After Vatican 2 the Boston Jesuit who helped us so much in our spirituality, in his introductory talk, pointed out how at different periods in the Church, when it became too immersed in Prestige, Possessions and Power, a reaction would eventually result in renewed awareness of the Action of the Holy Spirit. He gave examples of when in history this had happened. He then pointed to examples where it was happening since Vatican 2 in the 'Pilgrim Church in the Modern World.' These involved examples of this reviving spirituality appearing at all levels of Christian followers emphasising especially in the Laity. He helped us to form different groups for learning and sharing from our own spiritual discoveries and growth in 'Finding God' in *Events*

of our day, in Praying Scripture and in Nature. And gradually I was able to help start some such groups with mostly new Christians in the young parishes I was in. But after hearing him I remember the shock I got when I realised in Pentecost sermon-preparation time how little awareness I had till then of the action of the Holy Spirit in my life! Let us pray that the coming Synod of the Universal Church will be another huge help into our 'Finding God' present in our so needy world.

This is what this Scripture is saying to me now.

But what is the Spirit now saying to You?

Be still now and allow your heart to talk with Jesus

PENTECOST

Acts of the Apostles 2: 1- 41

Introduction

For Israel the Passover feast, commemorating liberation from slavery and receiving the Covenant, was the most important feast. Next, fifty days later, was Pentecost commemorating their being brought into a new home-land. For this feast also, Jerusalem would be very crowded with people, not only from throughout Israel, but also with pilgrims returning from many countries abroad. The disciples also, to thank and celebrate the Feast have now gathered in a special place. Surprise about to happen!

Acts 2: 1- 12. When Pentecost day came round, they had all met in one room, when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech.

Pondering and Praying

In my lengthy prayer-time, I am now gazing at this reverently-praying assembly. Suddenly they are startled by

the force and noise of a powerful, other-worldly wind filling the whole house! They feel scared and helpless. This changes to wonder and awe as what seems *‘like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them’*. Their hearts and outlook are deeply changed. *‘They were all filled with the Holy Spirit’*. And as a sign of being helped and guided in their future Mission of sharing all these gifts with others, *‘began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech’*. They are so astonished, bewildered but energised! I pause: this is God coming down on them enlightening and energising the whole group and each one in it. I pause, waiting to notice ‘what is it saying to me in my heart?’

The Effect (2: 5-12)

*Now there were devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, and at this sound they all assembled, each one bewildered to hear these men speaking his own language. They were amazed and astonished. “Surely” they said “all these men speaking are Galileans? How does it happen that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya round Cyrene; as well as visitors from Rome – Jews and proselytes alike – Cretans and Arabs; we hear them preaching in our own language about **the marvels of God.**” Everyone was amazed and unable to explain it; they asked one another what*

it all meant. I see awe deepening in them at ***‘the marvels of God.’***

The Apostles’ Response (2:14 - 36)

*‘Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and in a loud voice begins to speak’ ... to the huge crowd drawn by the sound and signs. He addresses them, ... ‘Men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, make no mistake about this, but listen carefully to what I say... (:22) ‘.. Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God by the miracles and portents and signs that God worked through him when he was among you, as you all know. This man, who was put into your power by the deliberate intention and foreknowledge of God, you took and had crucified by men outside the Law. You killed him, but.. (:24)...:(:32) **God raised this man Jesus to life, and all of us are witnesses to that. Now raised to the heights by God’s right hand, he has received from the Father the Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit.’ ... (:36) For this reason the whole House of Israel can be certain that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.’***

The first conversions (2:37- 41)

“Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the apostles, ‘What must we do, brothers?’ ‘You must repent’, Peter answered ‘and every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The

promise that was made is for you and your children, and for all those who are far away, for all those whom the Lord our God will call to himself.' He spoke to them for a long time using many arguments, and he urged them, 'Save yourselves from this perverse generation.' They were convinced by his arguments, and they accepted what he said and were baptised. That very day about three thousand were added to their number.

Praying and pondering this.

(I have summarised the Scripture in places). Let us ponder it and pray it, very conscious that what we see GOD doing in SCRIPTURE shows what HE is DOING NOW among us! Our travelling with the disciples in the '*Resurrection Appearances*' has increased our awareness of how much closer to the heart of the Risen Jesus we have been invited. Thus, like the Apostles and other witnesses of the Resurrection we too, with Mary's help, are praying deeply for greater openness of mind and heart to receive gifts of the Spirit. Also we are coming to realise how deeply all our *needy* world needs to accept that Gift of the Spirit. So let us in praying wait more with openness to allow God to *touch and change* our hearts more and that we be moved to share His gifts more in our own small worlds. Pausing here for awareness of the Spirit's promptings the following surfaced. I was led back to a former prayer-practice I now realised I was neglecting! This one was that when very annoying relationships were causing me to cry out to God to *change*

others I learned that only constant deep praying “Lord, change ‘so-and-so’ – *but start with Me!!*” gave fruit. And I would notice more and more in myself movements such as pride, self-righteousness, prejudices and such. These told me I first needed changes in my own heart for fruitful communicating the Lord’s heart. But responding to the Gifts of the Spirit leads us to make our ‘Widow’s Mite’ contribution to spreading the ‘*Reign of God*’.

*This is what the Scripture communicated to me,
But what is it communicating to You?*

Be still now, waiting with open heart
to promptings and guidance from the Spirit.

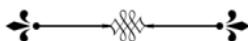
FOREWORD FOR 'ACTS OF THE APOSTLES'

Praying 'Acts of the Apostles'

The 'Praying' Scripture of 'Resurrection Experiences' has prepared us for the special 'Coming of the Holy Spirit' and the birth of the 'New People of God' at Pentecost. The 'Acts of the Apostles.' gives us a deeper awareness of God's Spirit at work. We see it in the Apostles, in St Paul and in the new Christians in their prayer and action times. We see the Spirit enlivening their pondering, discerning, trusting, acting, enduring suffering times while still spreading the love of the Father, the Risen Jesus and their Spirit. Following them in praying and acting different examples of the Spirit at work in God's love, renews awareness in the Present-day Church for all followers' to listen deeply together, cooperating to be guided, strengthened and united by the Spirit. It reminds all that the 'Pilgrim Church' is ever to journey together in the 'Modern World.'

Providently, Chapter 15 deals with the first Council of the Church, the Council of Jerusalem. At this time especially, I think it has much to teach us in our present preparations for and the carrying out of the Universal Church's Synod assembling 2023. It applies to not just the Bishops, but to all us members of the 'People of God – the Church'. Besides our praying for its fruitfulness in to-day's world the laity and ministers should be preparing at local levels to dialogue,

listen well and prayerfully discern together the Holy Spirit's guidance. Pope Francis himself is very much urging and leading this fervent praying, preparation and participation of all. May the first Apostles and disciples in their prayerful preparation for Pentecost teach and inspire us.



May praying the Gifts of the Resurrection
enliven our awareness of the Spirit
working in our communities and in the Synod.
May it also enliven a missionary spirit in
communities and prayers for our missionary work.



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*'Make me a channel of Your peace
Where there is despair in life,
let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, only light.
And where there is sadness, ever joy.*



*'Come Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful,
and kindle in them
the fire of Your love,
send forth Your Spirit
and they shall be created
and You shall renew
the face of the earth.'*