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The Church Opens Her Gates

By Rev. John Gavin, S.J.

May 25, 2025: Sixth Sunday of Easter
Acts 15. 1-2; 22-29; Revelation 21.10-14, 22-23; John 14. 23-29

As the Church continues her celebration of Easter, we prepare ourselves for the Ascension and the arrival of the Holy Spirit. The Paschal Mystery does not conclude with the appearances of the Risen Lord, but with the *departure* of Christ—His Ascension—and the *coming* of the Advocate. We therefore ready ourselves for the time of expectation, during which we wait for Christ’s return in the future, and the new life of the Spirit, through whom we are reborn and find life even now.

In our readings during these days, we also witness the opening of the Church to the world and the calling of all peoples to the Body of Christ. The Church does not close her gates to defend herself from the world but invites the world to become citizens of a new city. It is the Holy Spirit who guides the Church in this mission and forms her in the effective memory of all that Christ has done for us.

The Radiant City

The reading from *The Book of Revelation* describes John’s vision of the New Jerusalem, the hope of the Church. The Prophet Jeremiah had proclaimed God’s promise to the Hebrew people that Jerusalem would be restored to her glory: “[The] city shall be rebuilt upon its mound and the palace shall stand where it used to be. Out of them shall come songs of thanksgiving, and the voices of those who make merry” (Jer 30.18). And the Prophet Isaiah had conveyed the hope not only for a restoration of the people, but also for a new creation: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create’ for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a

joy” (Isa 65.17-18). The Apostle John, in his vision, discovers the fulfillment of these verses in the descent of the *new* city that dwarfs the old and shines with the radiance of Christ himself: “The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb.” This vision gives the Church the object of her expectation: the celestial city in which the resurrected will live in the very light of Christ. Thus, the Church waits to become full citizens and denizens in the New Jerusalem, that is, in the eternal rest of the Splendor of God.

The massive wall that fortifies the New Jerusalem has twelve gates: “There were three gates facing east, three north, three south, and three west.” Each gate holds the name of one of “the twelve apostles of the lamb.” We read further on in the same chapter of *Revelation* that these “gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations” (Rev 21.25-26). Thus, the celestial city fears no invasion, but rather her open gates serve as invitations for all peoples to become citizens and sharers in Christ’s splendor.

The gates open to the four directions of the world—north, south, east and west. This means that all the nations receive the call; the city unites the world’s peoples within her walls. Some Fathers of the Church noted that the four directions in Greek spell out a name:

*A**rktos* (ἄρκτος: North),

*D**u**sis* (δύσις: West)

*A**natolē* (ἀνατολή: East)

*M**esēmbria* (μεσημβρία: South)

For the Fathers, this acronym indicates that all humanity—ADAM—was scattered in the four directions due to sin. However, on the cross, Jesus stretched himself on the four beams into the four directions and, in his love for the Father and for us, he reunited the world. The gates of the four directions therefore represent what Christ accomplished: the opening of the gates of paradise in the four directions of the cross, the unbarring of the Heavenly Jerusalem for healing a shattered world and uniting a scattered humanity.

The Holy Spirit and the Church’s Mission

The gospel reading brings us back to Jesus’ farewell discourse, in which he prepares the disciples for his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. He promises that the Father will send the Advocate—the *Paraklētos*, that is, the one called to stand at another’s side—who will sustain them during his absence. St. Irenaeus writes that the Holy Spirit perfects and elevates the human person to the fullness of the divine likeness: “man is rendered spiritual and perfect because of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this is he [man] who was made in the image and likeness of God” (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, V, 6). Thus, Jesus’ promise of the Advocate will not only support the disciples during his absence but will also form them for the fullness of God’s Glory.

Jesus highlights two activities of the Holy Spirit: teaching and reminding. The Spirit teaches Christ's Word and preserves Christ's teaching for every generation. However, the Spirit's "reminding" has great significance. Reminding is more than just the impression of facts and ideas in the collective mind of the Church. Memory, in the scriptures, is effective and formative. What is remembered gives shape to reality. When God remembers his people, for instance, he is not just recalling their existence but rather blessing them and drawing them into his life. God's remembrance gives life:

Remember me, O Lord, when you show favor to your people;
help me when thou deliver them;
that I may see the prosperity of thy chosen ones,
that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation,
that I may glory with thy heritage. (Psalm 106:4-15)

And so it is when the Church remembers through the Spirit. Remembering through the Spirit makes the Lord present the life of the Church. The greatest act of remembering is the Eucharist, when the Spirit makes present the real presence of the Body and Blood of the Lord: "Do this in memory of me." In fact, every sacrament represents an effective ecclesial recollection of Christ's saving acts, in which, through the Spirit, the Lord gives form to each member of the Body. The Spirit therefore makes the Church's memory an ongoing reality in history, a transformative encounter with the Lord himself that heals and elevates to new life.

The second reading from *The Acts of the Apostles* shows how the Holy Spirit guides the Church in her sacred remembering and in her preaching of the gospel. In his speech to the assembly of the apostles and elders, Peter justifies the claim that the gentiles have been called to share in the Body of Christ without undergoing circumcision: "And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith" (Acts 15.8-9). In the New Covenant in Christ, it is now the Holy Spirit who opens the gates and brings in the nations. Thus, the elders decide to dispense the gentiles from the obligation of circumcision in favor of the cleansing power of the Spirit: "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us, not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities . . ." The New Creation will truly be the work of God in which sacraments—the effective remembering in the Spirit—will unite all in Christ.

Today our ever more fragmented world seeks the union of the Spirit. More than ever, the Church must proclaim the healing power of the Cross and the hope of the resurrection. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Church remembers all that Christ has told her and invites the world to share in that transformative memory. In the words of Pope John Paul II, in the time of the Church, the Spirit gives history a new form in Trinitarian love: "The love of God the Father, as a gift, infinite grace, source of life, has been made visible in Christ, and in his humanity that love has become 'part' of the universe, the human family and history. This appearing of grace in human history, through Jesus Christ, has been accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit, who is the source of all God's salvific activity in the world . . ." (John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 54). Inspired with this confidence, may

we hear Jesus' words anew—"Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid"—and invite the world to enter the gates and share in God's Glory.

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For Further Reading

Irenaeus of Lyons, [Adversus Haereses V](#)

John Paul II, [Dominum et Vivificantem](#)

In Short...

- *Christ's victory on the Cross reunites humanity scattered and fragmented by sin.*
- *The gates of the New Jerusalem—the heavenly city that represents the fulfillment of Christian hope—are opened to all peoples and all times. The Church has the mission to invite the nations to enter the splendor of God's Glory.*
- *The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, inspires the effective memory of the Church that, through the sacraments, continues the saving acts of Christ in history.*
- *The Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church in her preaching of the gospel to all the nations.*