

# Holy Spirit is key to unity in the church

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

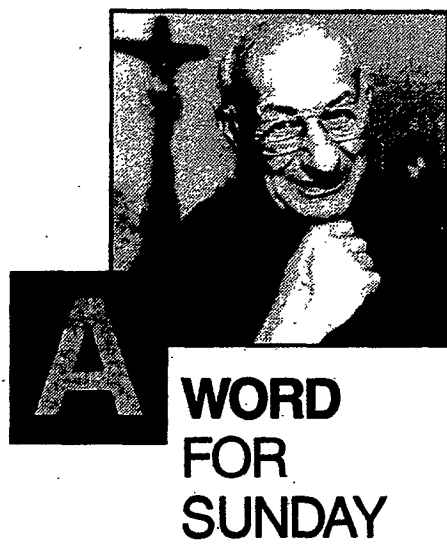
**Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 17:20-26; (R1) Acts 7:55-60; (R2) Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20**

So many of the readings after Easter turn our thoughts to the Holy Spirit, whose feast we celebrate on Pentecost. If we were to pick a word to tie together this Sunday's readings, it would be "Holy Spirit."

He is called by His name in the first reading: "Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit." He is called "life-giving water" in the second reading. And Jesus calls Him "His glory" in the Gospel.

The Spirit explains Stephen's life. Because he was filled with the Holy Spirit, he was able to defend himself on the spot, with no time given to prepare his defense in the face of bitter, clever, trained, and implacable foes. So forceful was his defense, so irrefutable his arguments, that the Scribes, Pharisees and the Sadducees had no other recourse but to kill him, as they had Jesus.

Because of the Spirit, Stephen was fearless in the face of death by stoning. Because of the Spirit, Stephen was



able to pray, like Jesus on the cross, that God forgive his enemies. Stephen's prayer turned Saul into Paul.

In the second reading, John speaks of the Spirit as "life-giving water."

One of the three great feasts celebrated every October by the Jews is the feast of Tabernacles. During this feast a pitcher of water was drawn each day for the feast from the pool of Siloam. In solemn procession it was

carried to the temple altar and offered as a libation to God. The water's pouring out recalled the rock in the desert from which God brought forth water for Israel. It also prefigured the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Messianic Age.

In Jesus' life, on the last and greatest day of the feast of Tabernacles, He stood up and exclaimed, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.'" St. John says that Jesus was referring to the Spirit (Jn. 7:37-39).

Water must be preceded by thirst. We must thirst for the Holy Spirit. "Let all who desire it accept the gift of life-giving water" — "who desire it." "If anyone thirst, let him come to me." To thirst for the Holy Spirit means to pray that He come to us. We do not pray enough for the Spirit to come to us. As the plant needs water, so we need to pray for the Spirit's water. As the plant dies without water, so our spiritual life will die without God's Spirit.

Finally, Jesus gave His apostles the "glory" the Father had given Him.

Why? "That they may be one, as we are one" — the Father and Jesus. In other words, the key to unity in the church is the Holy Spirit. The sacramental grace of the Mass is precisely this great gift: unity.

In the Eucharistic Prayer (II) we pray: "May all of us who receive the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit." Unity's bond is love and love's source is God: in the sacrament of love, holy Communion, and the God of Love, the Holy Spirit. Every Mass should be transforming each of us into more and more loving people. That is why Augustine said that the church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the church — by transforming the assembly of God's people into a community of loving people.

When the world sees the church as a community of loving people, it will realize that God is there. To love even one's enemies is not natural. It is supernatural; and those of good will deduce this and come into the church.

For this Jesus prayed: "I have given them the glory you gave me that they may be one, as we are one — that the world may believe that you sent me."

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