

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

### PENTECOST – YEAR A

#### Second Reading 1 Corinthians 12: 3–7, 12–13

Corinth was a bustling, wealthy centre of industry and shipbuilding, also famous for its architecture and the Arts. Its cosmopolitan population came from all parts of the Roman Empire. It was also a noted centre for sport, hosting the Isthmian games every other year. Even in a world very tolerant of sexual excess, Corinth had a reputation for debauchery. 'Living like a Corinthian' was a euphemism for living a dissolute life.

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, St Paul gives us a vivid picture of a first-century city. Indeed, the contemporary Christian will see many parallels between Corinth and any large town they know.

In this section of the Letter, Paul answers messages he has received from the Corinthians concerning strife and disharmony among the members of the local church. Here he particularly addresses the matter of spiritual gifts.

It seems that people had been bringing many gifts to the Church (see the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12: 8–10) and that there had been a discussion over which ones were the most important.

Paul's definition of a gift is wider than our present one. For him, gifts are all the graces bestowed on a given individual that can be used for the benefit of the Church: from practical gifts like administration and helping the poor, to miracles or speaking in tongues.

What matters for Paul is that these gifts should be used to uphold the Christian faith: they should be a factor of unity and not division among the community. Gifts are to be used not for self-glorification but for the common good.



## Gospel John 20: 19–23

### Pentecost

Originally Pentecost was a Jewish festival called the Feast of Weeks, celebrated on the fiftieth day after the beginning of the grain harvest. It was a major feast and very popular, when Jews came to Jerusalem from all over the area to celebrate.

### The Christian Feast of Pentecost

This is celebrated fifty days after Jesus's Resurrection. We find St Luke's account of the first Christian Pentecost in today's First Reading (Acts 2: 1–11). St John's account, however, takes place on the evening of the Day of Resurrection. Here we see the fulfilment and meaning of the passage where Jesus tells his confused disciples that he would see them again 'in a short time' (John 16: 16–19).

Having appeared to Mary of Magdala that morning, the risen Jesus now appears to his terrified disciples, meeting behind closed doors. As friends of Jesus, they are aware that the Jews may be out to arrest or even kill them.

### Chronological problems

As Jesus promised to send them the Spirit after returning to his Father (John 15: 26 and 16: 7), we can only conclude that in this Gospel, the Resurrection, the Ascension and the coming of the Spirit all happen on the same day. Scholars have puzzled over this, though it now seems accepted that exact chronology is of secondary importance.

### Jesus's promises fulfilled

In his description of the scene, John illustrates how everything that is taking place is a fulfilment of the promises Jesus made to his disciples as he prepared them for his death and subsequent return. (See John's Farewell Discourses, Chapter 13: 33–38, and Chapters 14 to 17).

### 'Peace be with you'

This is a normal Middle Eastern greeting which can be translated as 'May God give you everything'. Its close repetition gives it more significance and recalls Jesus's words to the disciples: '*Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you.*' (14: 17)

### The commission

Jesus sends out the disciples to proclaim the message of God's forgiveness (also recorded by the other evangelists: Matthew 28: 19, Luke 24: 47 and Mark 16: 15). They will be able to fulfil their tasks now that they are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Since the sixteenth-century Council of Trent, this power to forgive sins is formally exercised in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.