

**May 26, 2019**

Acts 15:1-2,22-29; Rev 21:10-14,22-23; Jn 14:23-29

Fans of the Star Wars movies will remember the shocking scene where Ben Kenobi is dueling with Darth Vader. Luke has just begun to train as a Jedi, and is really not up to the task that is ahead of him. I remember thinking during that scene “wow nothing better happen to Ben, Luke won’t be able to do it without him - he has so much to learn.” I think the first time I saw the scene I shouted along with Luke “NO!!” when Ben is killed by Darth Vader. What are they all going to do without the wise teacher, what are they going to do without the person who knows all about the Force, and all about what needs to happen? What are they going to do without him?

This is a similar situation that the Apostles were in after Jesus’ death. Although they did get to see him after he rose from the dead (similar to Ben continuing to appear in a spiritual form to Luke), they are finally left without a visible form of their master after he ascends to heaven. Like Ben, Jesus is still there, just not like he was before - Jesus did not leave his little group alone. Looking at them you could ask the same question we asked above: What are they going to do without him? He knew these worries and he tells them: *The Advocate, the Holy Spirit ... will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.* He was going to be present to them in other ways. Not like the mystical presence that Ben has in later Star Wars movies, nor that physical presence of Jesus’ risen body they saw up to the Ascension - but something more powerful than they could possibly imagine. Jesus will be present in the body of the Church and by the Holy Spirit.

God’s presence is experienced unseen in the God the Father, in a physical body in God the Son (Jesus Christ), and will now be a mysterious and universal presence of God the Holy Spirit. Jesus says in the Gospel: *Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.* It is interesting that Jesus says *we will come to [them] and make our dwelling with [them].* God is a single being who is a community of persons, and that presence of God is experienced by us at different times with one of these persons seeming more obvious to us. Sometimes, maybe on a cool Spring evening, we are outside looking to the stars and are struck by a realization of the Father who created all things and gives life to the whole of creation - and is limitlessly beyond all of this creation. Sometimes we may feel the physical touch of Jesus through his body the Church - either through the actions of that Body’s members, or during Jesus’ presence in Mass and the sacraments (most obviously in the Eucharist). At other times we are struck with a wise and insightful realization, or feel the words of a scripture reading, a homily, a prayer, touch us personally as if God is speaking in some mysterious way to us. We may also have an unexplained ability to cope with problems, or

have the strength to go on, or to love the hard to love. We may simply have an understanding of how God's will is working in a situation, or be inspired to seek advice, approach Jesus in Penance, or encounter him at Mass. These things are the mysterious way that the Holy Spirit of God touches us, guides us, draws us to Godself, and provides what Jesus promised.

But Jesus says more, he says that God will make a dwelling with us - that God will not just be some mysterious visitor, some external "force," but the God will live with us in a powerful way. He does this as he comes to live with us as a baby in Bethlehem, and he continues that presence as he remains in his Church. We heard in the second reading: *The wall of the city had twelve courses of stones as its foundation, on which were inscribed the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.* Along with the prophetic writer of this passage, we believe that the 12 Apostles are foundational to the functioning of the Church, that when Jesus tells them: *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses ... even to the remotest part of the earth<sup>1</sup>*; when he tells Simon: *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven<sup>2</sup>*; when he breathes on them and says: *Receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them<sup>3</sup>*; and when he says to them today: *The Holy Spirit ... will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you* - he is giving them the Holy Spirit in a special way.

Although they (and their successors, our Bishops) are fallible humans, the Spirit of God dwells in them, and they (as a full group over history - not just individually at one time) will teach accurately how to interpret the scriptures, and God will speak by the Holy Spirit through that teaching authority of the Church to guide us. This belief was present in the earliest of times. In the first reading, we heard the Apostles say when declaring a teaching: *It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us.* A bold statement, but it shows a belief in their authority, and explains why when there was this dispute in the early days they took it to the Apostles for a decision. It also explains why, after Apostles gave their ruling, all simply followed this as what God wanted.

After his death and resurrection of Jesus, the presence of God has become more powerful than we could ever imagine. A presence of inspiration and awe, a presence of Jesus' body in the members of the Church and in the Eucharist and other sacraments, and a voice coming to us in the silence of our hearts and from the Magisterium of the Church made up of the present day Apostles, the Bishops. God has indeed made a dwelling with us, and has sent us the Holy Spirit to be present and to support and continue to teach us in many ways - just as Jesus promised.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 1:8

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 16:18-19

<sup>3</sup> John 20:22-23