



Saturday, 25th Week in Ordinary Time / Feast of St Jerome



Date: Saturday, September 30, 2017 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** A

First Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14–17

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 119:9–14 | **Response:** Psalm 119:12

Gospel Acclamation: Acts 16:14b

Gospel Reading: Matthew 13:47–52

Preached at: the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Today we celebrate two things. The first is all of you who have been doing this Alpha Course and who I think have been learning more and more about their faith in God the Father who created us, and in Jesus Christ his Son who came to save us, and in the Holy Spirit that has been sent so that each one of us might personally know God.

I'm reminded of this joke that I heard once. The old archbishop of Cape Town, Cardinal McCann was once asked by a teenager whether he had received the Holy Spirit. I think at that time it was common to have people claim the Spirit had come upon them and they could speak in tongues etc. Anyway – the Cardinal looked startled and drew himself up to his full height and spluttered: “Received?” ... “Received the Holy Spirit?” ... “My dear child, I *GIVE* the Holy Spirit”.

Of course it's true that when Bishops give us the sacrament of Confirmation we receive the Holy Spirit. And we know that we have received it because we can see evidence of that in the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

I'm sure you will study and talk about these gifts and fruits. But the point I'd like to underline for us today is that we live in an age of the Spirit. The Jews came to know God the Father. The Apostles had the privilege of knowing Jesus Christ his Son. But when he ascended to the Father, he promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to be our advocate, our helper. Now of course, it's true that the Son of God was the Word and was present in the beginning, just as the Father was present during Jesus' life, and our own. We can recall how Jesus

spoke to His Father and always encouraged us to pray to Him. But in our time, the Holy Spirit is what is our primary access to God. Many Catholics don't realise this – but we live in this age of the Spirit. Pope Francis knows this well which is why he wants people to pray and look at what God is doing now in our own lives – not looking back at what had happened, but rather looking at where God is at work, through the Holy Spirit, in our own lives today.

I think that's quite significant. But I also think it can be difficult to identify – because God the Holy Spirit is not the only Spirit in town – there's also the Evil Spirit – what we call Satan or the Devil – but essentially he is the Prince of Lies and the one who Tempts us to stop praying, to walk away from our relationship with God, to throw away the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to allow the fruits of the Holy Spirit to rot and decay in our lives. So we have to be careful how we listen to God.

But we can always ask the Holy Spirit to help us. When we make decisions, when we need help to pray, when we want to live as a Christian – the Holy Spirit is the Person we should ask for help. The more we come to rely on the Holy Spirit, the more the Spirit of God will be in us.

This brings me to the second thing we celebrate today. Today is the feast of St Jerome – that great saint who was born in Croatia in the year 345. At the age of twelve years, he went to Rome to study and was baptized there when he was about nineteen. He then went to Trier, in Germany, to study theology, and he spent a few years (368–72) in Aquileia, in northern Italy, living a quasi-monastic life with friends. He then lived for two years in the Syrian desert near Aleppo, and while there he studied Greek and Hebrew. From there, he went (374) to Antioch (now Antakya, Turkey), where he was ordained (379) a priest. He was back in Rome in 382 and became secretary to Pope Damasus I, who asked him to revise the Old Latin version of the New Testament that was then in use; at the same time, he translated the Psalter from the Septuagint, which is the Old Testament in Greek. When Pope Damasus died, Jerome left Rome and went to Bethlehem, where he founded a monastery, opened a school for boys, and spent the remainder of his life writing. Jerome was one of the most learned men of his age. Between 391 and 406, he made new Latin translations of all the books found in the Hebrew Bible. His translation eventually became known as the Vulgate, and it was his greatest achievement. He likewise wrote many commentaries on various books of the Bible. He was the first biblical scholar and his

scholarship was unsurpassed in the early Church. Because of his immense erudition and his distinguished writing, by the eighth century he was honored as a doctor of the Church. He died in Bethlehem on September 30, 420.

So that's a little bit about Jerome – but the important thing is he dedicated his life to the study of Scripture. We believe that God has revealed himself to us. In Jesus Christ, in the Sacraments of the Eucharist, but also in the Word – in the Sacred Word that was not just the Word from which all Creation sprung, but also the Word which is the Sacred Scripture we read and pray and study. It's always good to recognize that God is in our life – but equally – God is also in the Word, and if you are finding it hard to find God, perhaps you need to read some of the Bible – study the scriptures, pray with them. And when you do, ask the Holy Spirit to be with you, to help you understand what God wants you to understand, to be helped by the intimate words of God himself.

The relationship we have with God is the true treasure of our Church. When the separation comes at the end of time, as we hear in the Gospel, God wants to gather all to himself, but those who know God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, will be the righteous ones.

So today I want to thank all of you for persevering in this Alpha Course – for wanting to learn more about God and His Church, and your place in it – because all of you belong to the Church because you belong to God. God loves you and the Church wants you to feel at home. But the best way to do that is to share your enthusiasm and faith with others. This faith will help you be righteous, to be just, to act with mercy and to live in peace with all the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit evident in your lives.

Let us pray today that we might increasingly come to know God, God the Father who created and loves us; God the Son who saved us and shows us the way to the Father; and God the Holy Spirit, who has been sent to look after each one of us, and to empower, enliven and encourage us.

Amen.

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