

JUNE 12, 2011
PENTECOST SUNDAY

JOHN 20: 19-23

This is a quiet Gospel, compared to the dramatic events of the actual Pentecost story. Here, there is no mighty wind, no tongues of flame, no sermon that's heard in every listener's own language.

Still, even in its gentleness, this gospel offers a strong push. Jesus blesses his disciples with peace, shows them his hands and feet, and breathes forth his Spirit. Then he immediately announces that he's *sending* them—just as the Father has sent him. He's inviting them to enter the rhythm of which the CDP *Constitution* speaks: "as active service draws us to contemplation, contemplation impels us to serve" (#58).

Even beyond the challenge to go forth, the passage is unsettling. What does Jesus mean when he speaks about forgiving sins or retaining them? How does "retaining sins" accord with Jesus' admonition that we must not judge?

I'm still wrestling with that sentence. For now, I make sense of it by thinking beyond our usual definition of sin. One form of sin, I believe, is the failure to expect enough from ourselves and others. I myself tend to be such a nurturer and encourager that I often fail to be a demander of excellence.

This Gospel challenges me, then, to extend not only forgiveness but also firmness. In my life, that means carrying on the legacy given to me by a host of splendid teachers—among them, Generosa Callahan, Lora Ann Quinonez, Denise Billeaud, Joan Michele Rake, Christine Morkovsky, Al Griffith, and Bob Gibbons. By insisting that my students ask harder questions, that they express themselves more precisely and gracefully, I will both disturb and enlarge their peace (and my own). Thus I hope to embody the spirit of Pentecost—the pouring forth of both peace and power.

--Francine Danis, Associate

For reflection or sharing:

- Δ What does it mean to me when I hear Jesus speak about forgiving sins and retaining sins?
- Δ Have I challenged myself to examine my life? ... to push myself when necessary? to forgive myself when I fail? to push others ... to forgive others?