

Solemnity of Pentecost: Mass of the Day A2023

Today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles. In the Jewish Tradition, the feast of Pentecost was celebrated fifty days after the Passover as we do by celebrating it fifty days after Easter.

In the Jewish tradition, Pentecost was mostly an agricultural celebration. During the festivities, the Israelites offered to God the first fruits of the land, as required in the book of Exodus 34. Later, Pentecost became the feast of the commemoration of the giving of the Law, and therefore, as the founding feast of Israel as a nation, for without the Law no nation can exist. These two meanings of the Jewish Pentecost, as a feast of harvest and a commemoration of the giving of the Law play a big role in the understanding of Christian celebration of Pentecost.

At Sinai when the Law was given, the mountain was burning with fire and the lightning flashed like the smoke of furnace. Then, God spoke to the Israelites from the midst of the fire (Deuteronomy 4). In Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, as the apostles proclaimed the risen Christ to people, there was a noise like a strong driving wind and the tongues of fire rested upon each of the apostles.

Thus, in the narrative of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, it appears clearly that it is not the Law of Moses that is the foundation of the Christian community, but the new law of the Spirit Jesus gave to the apostles. Moreover, just as the first fruits of the harvest were consecrated to God by the Israelites, so at Pentecost in Jerusalem, people of all nations and languages, Jews and converts, were received in the Church as God's mighty acts were proclaimed to them through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The action of the Holy Spirit is often more invisible than visible. This is why in the Acts his presence is described in terms of wind and fire. Like a strong wind, the Holy Spirit can transform everything and every situation for the good of the Church and of those who believe in our Lord. Like a fire, the Holy Spirit can destroy sin and everything that prevents us from accepting God and acknowledging Jesus as our Lord. He can give courage and strength to bear witness to Jesus as it happened in the aftermath of the resurrection of our Lord.

The Holy Spirit is the power that our Lord uses to keep his disciples in good relationship with him and the Father. He is like the level tool that the builders use to make sure the walls of the constructed house are straight. Any builder attempting to build without a level tool might be doing it wrong without knowing. That is why St Paul says, "No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12: 3). In other words, the Holy Spirit is crucial for our spiritual growth. We really need him to stay on the right path that leads to salvation and connection with our Lord.

However, our Lord does not force our hands; he lets us free to walk in his ways or to do things our own ways, without him. In the same way, the Holy Spirit does not act automatically or magically in us. As no one can enter a door that is locked; neither can the Holy Spirit act in us if we do not open our heart to him.

The Holy Spirit, our Lord and the Father are one. For that reason our Lord says, "(The Holy Spirit) will not speak on his own, but will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is

mine and declare it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16: 13-15).

There is only one Spirit, but he produces different kinds of spirituals gifts, different forms of service and different types of work. St Basil the great writes that, “Like the sunshine, which permeates all the atmosphere, spreading over land and sea, and yet is enjoyed by each person as though it were for him alone, so the Spirit pours forth his grace in full measure, sufficient for all, and yet is present as though exclusively to everyone who can receive him”. In other words, the Holy Spirit is like a prism that refracts a light by producing a spectrum of different colors of its constituent: white, green, yellow, blue, red, all coming from the same source.

The Holy Spirit acts within the disciples to make them conform to our Lord. He fills the hearts of the faithful by making them the temple of God, sons and daughters of the Father. He dwells in the Church and operates with his power in all the sacraments of the Church in distributing God’s grace. He bestows gifts and charisms for the growth of the Church and the sanctification of the people of God. He contributes to the unity of the people of God. Where he is absent, people sink in divisions, oppositions and wars with one another.

One of the gifts the Holy Spirit gives is peace. Peace is a messianic gift. When our Lord was born in Bethlehem, the angels announced to the shepherds the great news of joy and peace to the whole world. The presence of our Lord is a manifestation of peace. The first thing our Lord wants to anyone of us is peace. That is why anytime he appeared after his resurrection from the dead, he wished peace to his disciples, as we heard in today’s Gospel.

There is no big cause that disturbs our peace of heart than sin. Then, we understand why our Lord links peace to the forgiveness of sin: “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”

By giving an order to his disciples to forgive sins, our Lord institutes the sacrament of confession. He gives to the apostles a ministry to be exercised in his name for the good of the whole Church. By giving this sacrament, our Lord comes to the rescue of our weakness so that we count on God’s mercy. Without God’s forgiveness in the sacrament of confession, we are lost. In the sacrament of confession, we reconcile with our God, with one another. Let us turn to our Lord with faith and ask the Father to forgive our sins. Let us ask the Lord to fill us with the Holy Spirit and direct our lives according to his will.

Acts 2: 1-11; 1 Corinthians 12: 3b-7, 12-13; John 20: 19-23



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