

Solemnity of the Pentecost B2024

Today we celebrate the feast of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles we call Pentecost. The feast of Pentecost happened fifty days after the resurrection of our Lord. The Gospel of Luke 24: 49 and Acts 1: 4 say that at his resurrection our Lord recommended his disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit that the Father promised, and in which they would be baptized.

The first reading of this day recounts what happened when that day was fulfilled. As the disciples were all gathered in one place, a strong wind shook the building in which they were while the tongues of fire appeared over them all. They started speaking and proclaiming the mighty acts of God in different languages.

In comparison to the fear that struck the disciples to the point of running away when Jesus was arrested, we see a big shift. Now they come out, they speak without fear and proclaim the Gospel without panic. That day brought together Christians and pagans to the same table of the word of the Lord at the surprise of many of them. As the Holy Spirit gathered them all in the beginning, in spite of their different backgrounds, so he gathers today different nations into one people, the people of God.

What happened on that day give us an idea of the identity of the Holy Spirit, his role and his work. The Holy Spirit is the power that the Father sends on behalf of his Son to sanctify the Church and the believers, to make us true witnesses of the Gospel and instruments of salvation to the world. The Holy Spirit is the source of holiness, courage, strength and light that enlightens the minds of the believers to know the truth of Jesus, to love it and dwell in it. The Holy Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of those who believe as in a temple. As baptized and confirmed, we all are the temples of the Holy Spirit. But, is he still living in our house or we have built up so many obstacles that he cannot be manifested?

The work of the Holy Spirit is to make us confident witnesses as we show the world that there is more to life than mere survival or the pursuit of pleasure. The Spirit of truth allows us to witness in every era to the timeless message of God's love. That is the message we have received from the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit who guides us to the whole understanding of this message of salvation.

Our interactions with the Holy Spirit cause within us an inner urge to experience the closeness of God. The Holy Spirit stimulates our desire to seek God, to experience his love and his power at work in the ways we live with others. The Holy Spirit gives us inspirations or felt "movements" of God's love for us and God's love within us. The Holy Spirit gives us calls, attractions, and insights, those moments when we see things in new ways. The Holy Spirit gives us times when we are aware that we are doing what God wants us to do. These are moments that are "outside" and "above" of what we ordinarily do.

To live by the Holy Spirit requires surrendering to him so that he takes control of our life. Without surrendering to him, it will be impossible to please God. When we are guided by him, anyone encountering us will see in us the living presence of Jesus. Anyone in whom the Holy Spirit truly dwells is transformed and becomes a new creature.

That is why St Paul exhorts us in the second reading to live by the Spirit rather than the desire of the flesh. As he says, "Live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want." The word "Flesh" doesn't refer to skin, it refers rather to unredeemed human nature, human nature wounded by sin. What is of the flesh is humanity divorced from God's life. To follow the Spirit means to give rise to a holy way of life which is recognizable in the practice of virtues like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. To follow the desire of the flesh means to lead a disordered life in which the Spirit is absent. Such a type of life is recognizable by its impulses like immorality, impurity, lust, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, rivalry, jealousy, fury, selfishness, dissensions, envy, drinking bouts and orgies.

Brothers and Sisters, Pentecost does not belong to the past. It is here with us today calling us to overcome our reluctance to be pushed forward by God's Spirit and to do what we know and see to be right and just and truthful. The Holy Spirit inspires us to do what God wants us to do. Let the Spirit make you free, free to walk in the glorious freedom of the sons and daughters of God, not just for our own sake but more importantly for the life of the world. Cast aside your inner fears, for the Evil One's greatest weapon is fear. It is through fear that Satan controls us. Let the blessings and the love of the Holy Spirit take a hold of you.

Let me finish with a story: At the beginning of the last century a family from southern Italy immigrated to the United States. Not having enough money to pay for meals at restaurants, they took bread and cheese with them for the trip. As the days and weeks passed, the bread became stale and the cheese moldy. At a certain point their child could not take it anymore and could do nothing but cry.

The parents took the last bit of money they had and gave it to him so that he could have a nice meal at a restaurant. The child went, ate and came back to his parents in tears. The parents asked: "We have spent all the money we had left to buy you a nice meal and you are still crying?"

"I am crying because I found out that one meal a day was included in the price and this whole time we have been eating bread and cheese!"

Many among us go through life with only "bread and cheese," without joy, without enthusiasm, when they could, spiritually speaking, every day enjoy every good thing of God, all being included in the price of being Christians. The secret for experiencing that which John XXIII called "a new Pentecost" is called prayer. That is where we find the "spark" to surrender to the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2: 1-11; Galatians 5: 16-25; John 15: 26-27; 16: 12-15



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