

Homily of Pentecost Sunday Year C

In the Old Testament, the Feast of Pentecost is a major Jewish agricultural festival of expressing thanksgiving to God for the blessing of the harvest. It is celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover (Leviticus 23:15-16). Pentecost in Greek means fifty. It is a major pilgrimage feast when all Jewish males were required to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem.

While others were celebrating the harvest festival, the apostles hid themselves in a room in prayer until the Holy Spirit descended upon them. "They were filled with Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim." The Jewish pilgrims from every nation who were in Jerusalem gathered in amazement to where the apostles were. Everyone heard them speaking in his own language. God planned the descent of the Holy Spirit at a time Jewish pilgrims from every nation were in Jerusalem so that as many people as possible witnessed the New Testament Pentecost. It took place fifty days from Easter. We can see that the New Testament Pentecost is rooted in the Old Testament Pentecost.

The celebration of Pentecost helps us to recall the event of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Then, God scattered the people all over the earth by confusing their language. During Pentecost, God brought united all nations through language by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church was conceived during Peter's great confession of faith. "And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18-19). It was on the day of the New Testament Pentecost that the Catholic Church was born: the One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the Church has continued to speak in different tongues in every nation, and all peoples hear the mighty acts of God in their own language.

This celebration is our prayer for a new Pentecost for each one of us. We need the renewal and the revival of the gifts of the Holy Spirit which we have already received when God created us, and when we received various Sacraments and genuine spiritual experiences. For some of us, the current or power of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is low. And for some of us, the current is completely gone. St. Paul enjoins us to "fan into flame the gifts of God we have received" (2 Timothy 1:6).

How do we know that the gift of the Holy Spirit is alive and active in a person? Is it only by praying or speaking in tongues? No. Is it only by being slain in the spirit? No. Is it only by some mystic experience? No. Is it only by speaking in human and angelic tongues? No. Is it only by prophetic utterances and display of mighty deeds? No. There are people who claim to act by the power and unction of the Holy Spirit; but their activities are not by the power of the Holy Spirit. For such people Jesus quotes Prophet Isaiah, "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts" (Matthew 15:8-9). In Matthew 7:15 Jesus warns "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves." And in Matthew 7:22 he cautions, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?' Then I will declare to them solemnly, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.'"

The power of the Holy Spirit is known by the manifestation of enduring fruits of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:20). St. Paul spells out the fruits of the Holy Spirit in his letters: 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God did not confer on us a spirit of bashfulness but of strength, love and good judgement. Galatians 5:22, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." These fruits do not exhaust the list. An important fruit I would like to add is a healthy prayer life.

We pray that we may fan into flame the gifts of the Holy Spirit we have received: Spirit of Wisdom, Spirit of Understanding, Spirit of Understanding, Spirit of Knowledge, Spirit of Counsel, Spirit of Fortitude, Spirit of Piety, and Spirit of Holy Fear (Isaiah 11:2-3). The fruits of the Holy Spirit come from the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are alive and active.

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