

Homily of Pentecost Sunday of Year B, 2021

Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1, 29-34; 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23

The Church was conceived when Jesus said to Peter, "You are the rock, upon you I will build my Church" (Matthew 16:18). But the Church was born on Pentecost Sunday with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles.

Among the Jews in the Old Testament, the feast of Pentecost was when Jewish pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem from various parts of the world: Europe, Asia, and Africa to celebrate the festival of thanksgiving for the first fruits of their harvest (Numbers 28:26). Before his ascension, Jesus instructed the apostles to go and wait in Jerusalem until the coming of the Holy Spirit. The apostles returned to Jerusalem, and locked themselves up in the upper room (Acts 1:13). While the crowds were celebrating the feast of Pentecost, the apostles remained up in the upper and stayed in prayer. It took the power of the Holy Spirit to liberate the apostles from the fear of the Jews and bring them out of their hiding.

We read in the first reading, "Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, 'Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans?'" One of the miracles of the descent of the Holy Spirit was that the apostles spoke in different languages, in such a way that people from various parts of the world could understand them in their own language. We recall that in Genesis, God used language to disperse the builders of the Tower of Babel (Genesis:11:1-9). During the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, God used language to unite all peoples (Acts 2:11). One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is that the Church is able to preach the message of Christ in different languages in all parts of the world.

The celebration of Pentecost Sunday is our prayer for individual Pentecost experience. We pray for the renewal or revival of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us. Isaiah 11:2-3 names the following gifts: wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. These gifts can be called foundation gifts on which numerous other gifts of the Holy Spirit are rooted into.

St. Paul names some other gifts which have been referred to as extraordinary or charismatic gifts: faith, healing, mighty deeds (miracles), prophecy, discernment of spirits, varieties of tongues (variety of languages), interpretation of tongues (interpretation of languages), apostleship (discipleship), teaching, assistance, and administration (1 Corinthians 12:9-10, 28). These extraordinary or charismatic gifts are nourished by the foundation gifts named above.

The sign that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are effective and active are the lasting fruits they bear. St. Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 mentions some of the fruits as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

For many of us, it is true that the gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed on us are either inactive or minimally active. For this reason, St. Paul urges us, "I invite you to fan into flame the gift of God you received through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6).

However, there are spiritual conditions that enable revival of the gifts and for us to experience personal or interior Pentecost. The first condition is as St. Paul urges us, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light" (Ephesians 5:14). The second condition is as St. Paul, also, invites us, "Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:12).

Through the grace of Pentecost, may we be able to "arise from dead." May we be able "to throw off the works of darkness." May we be liberated from hiding and freed from "the fear of the Jews." May the fire of the Holy Spirit descend on us that we fan into flame the gifts God has given to us; and may the gifts bear lasting fruits.

Shall we rise and sing:

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.

Melt me, mold me, fill me, and use me. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.

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