

Come, Holy Spirit, Fill the Hearts of Your Faithful

Pentecost is here. Fifty days following the Passover (or, for Christians, the fiftieth day of Easter), this is a tremendously important feast. According to Wikipedia, “Rabbinic Judaism...commemorated through ‘*hag shabuot*’ the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, because, according to Exodus 19:1, this event took place on the fiftieth day after the departure from Egypt. Christians place on the day of Pentecost the birth of the Church, a phenomenon characterized by the Descent of the Holy Spirit” (Acts ch. 2).

“We understand now that the Pentecost is a powerful feast of *salvation*, because it speaks about the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, about the founding of the Church, and about the Final Judgment.” For the followers of Christ, Pentecost fulfilled the promises, not only of the prophets, but also of Jesus at the Last Supper: “But the Comforter [παράκλητος], which is the Holy Spirit [το πνευμα το ‘άγιον], Whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (Wikipedia, John 14:26).

“The Apostles were very aware that what happened to them was a *descent* of the Holy Spirit, so, in his sermon, Peter quotes the entire chapter 3 of the book of Joel. There are, in fact, three major prophetic texts which speak about the Descent of the Holy Spirit: Ezekiel 36:27, Isaiah 44:3 and, of course, Joel 3:1-5. The Christian dogma, based upon John 14:20, affirms that the Descent of the Holy Spirit signifies the extension of the divine body of Christ in all the believers, being the last fundamental act of the objective salvation (i.e. the salvation of mankind). The phenomenon was closely linked to the *eschaton* (the end of the world) by Joel and it is very symptomatic that Peter quoted, on this matter, no other but Joel:

““And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.””

I quote Wikipedia at length to demonstrate how easy it is to access decent information online. Sometimes it takes a secular publication to remind us of the importance of key events that we might otherwise take for granted.

In fact, the secret of Pentecost is that it only becomes real for us when we take it to heart. If any Christian event needs to be celebrated in the here and now, it's Pentecost. The power and gifts of Pentecost are still fully available today to those who call upon the name of Jesus. And, perhaps more than ever, the world needs a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Anyone who has experienced the anointing of the Holy Spirit knows how radically their lives can be transformed and how much godly energy can be released. In the following quotes from the late Pope John Paul II, I will highlight three areas in which the Spirit empowers Christian discipleship.

First of all, the Holy Spirit *creates* the Church as the living Body of Christ: "The Holy Spirit dwells in the Church not as a guest who still remains an outsider, but as the soul that transforms the community into 'God's holy temple' (1 Cor 3:17; cf. 6:19; Eph 2:21) and makes it more and more like himself through his specific gift, which is love (cf. Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22)."

Christian charity gives substance, virtue, and authenticity to the Church. John Paul II continues: "'Love' - the Second Vatican Council teaches in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* - 'governs, gives meaning to and perfects all the means of sanctification' (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 42). Love is the 'heart' of Christ's Mystical Body, as we read in a beautiful autobiographical passage of St. Therese of the Child Jesus: 'I understood that if the Church had a body composed of different members, the most necessary and noble of all could not be lacking to it, and so I understood that the Church had a heart and that this heart was burning with Love. I understood that it was Love alone that made the Church's members act; that if Love were ever extinguished, apostles would not proclaim the Gospel and martyrs would refuse to shed their blood.... I understood that Love was everything, that it embraced all times and places...in a word that it was eternal!'" (*Autobiography*, B.3vo) (General Audience, July 8, 1998)

The Spirit moves us to proclaim the Gospel. On Pentecost, Peter's preaching converted 3,000 people. In his General Audience of July 1st, 1998, Pope John Paul II stated: "Evangelizing in the power of the Spirit means being invested with that power which was supremely manifested in Jesus' evangelizing activity. The Gospel tell us that those who listened to

him were astonished at his teaching ‘because he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes’ (Mk 1:22). Jesus’ word drives out demons, calms storms, heals the sick, forgives sinners and raises the dead.”

Thirdly, the gift of Pentecost perfects the Church and the Christian faithful.

“The Holy Spirit's presence in the Church enables her, despite being marked by the sin of her members, to be preserved from defect. Holiness not only replaces sin, but overcomes it. In this sense, too, we can say with St. Paul that where sin abounds, grace even more abounds (cf. Rom 5:20).”

“The Spirit who dwells in the Church also abides in the heart of every member of the faithful: he is the *dulcis hospes animae*. Following a path of conversion and personal sanctification, then, means allowing ourselves to be ‘led’ by the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:14), letting him act, pray and love in us. ‘Becoming holy’ is possible if we allow ourselves to be made holy by him who is the Holy One, by docilely cooperating with his transforming action.”

John Paul II added: “The Holy Spirit's presence truly and inwardly transforms man: it is sanctifying or *deifying* grace, which elevates our being and our acting, enabling us to live in relationship with the Holy Trinity. This takes place through the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, ‘which adapt man’s faculties for participation in the divine nature’ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 1812*)...By charity the disciple is obliged to love God with his whole heart and to love others as Jesus loved them, that is, to the total giving of self.” (General Audience, July 22, 1998)

So the work of the Holy Spirit begins, continues, and ends in Love. In fact, you could say that the Spirit is God’s love in action for our salvation.

That’s why Jesus warned that to blaspheme the Holy Spirit is unforgivable.

If you reject the very means by which God pours out his love, grace, and mercy into the world, how else will you obtain what you need to be saved?

But to those who call upon the name of the Lord in faith, the Spirit is ready to descend and to anoint, so that we too might say, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has anointed me to proclaim the Good News.” (Luke 4: 18)

St. Paul put it this way: “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear, but a spirit of adoption through which we cry out, ‘Abba!’” (Romans 8:14). May the gift of Pentecost remind us all of who we are in Christ. *Fr. Dean.*