

## PENTECOST

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always"(John 14:15-16).

Dear brothers and sisters, last Sunday, we celebrated the feast of Ascension. A feast which speaks of a new presence of the risen Lord. He was taken up into God's very being, participating in God's powerful presence in the world" (Joseph Ratzinger, Jesus of Nazareth, p.284). Prior to the resurrection and after it the Lord had promised several times that he would go to the Father and he would send the Holy Spirit on his Apostles. In our first reading on the feast of Ascension for instance, the Lord expressly enjoined the Apostles not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for "the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit"( Acts 1:4-5). The Feast of Pentecost is the fulfilment of this promise of the Lord. Hence, the Pentecost is the grand finale of the feast of Easter. The Bride of Christ speaks eloquently of this: On the day of Pentecost when the seven weeks of Easter had come to an end, Christ's Passover is fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, manifested, given, and communicated as a divine person: of his fullness, Christ, the Lord, pours out the Spirit in abundance"(CCC 731). The Scripture speaks of this clearly, "Exalted at the right hand of God, he received the promise of the holy Spirit from the Father and poured it forth" (Acts 2:33). Laying out clearly what happened on the Pentecost, the Church teaches,

On that day, the Holy Trinity is fully revealed. Since that day, the Kingdom announced by Christ has been open to those who believe in him...By the coming of the Holy Spirit, which never ceases, the Holy Spirit causes the world to enter into the "last days," the time of the Church, the Kingdom already inherited though not yet consummated ( CCC 732).

Before the Holy Spirit came, the Apostles were huddled up in fear in the upper room. Once, the Holy Spirit descended on them, everything changed. They were no longer afraid. They stepped out into the open and bore witness to Christ.

What did they do to receive the Holy Spirit? They loved Jesus and they prayed with Mary Mother of Christ. Compare this with the attitude of the people who built the tower of Babel at a place called Shinar (Genesis 11:1-9). Those people want to build a city without God and against God. It was a Godless and anti-God venture. What it brought was chaos, confusion and crisis. On the Pentecost Day because the Apostles together with the Mother of God were attuned to God, they received the Holy Spirit. The confusion of languages and division that happened at the tower of Babel was reversed. Everybody from different parts of the world who were there understood the God's message of salvation spoken through the Apostles. In their amazement they exclaimed: "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God"(Acts 2:7-11). On the spiritual meaning of this phenomenon, St Anthony wrote, "The man who is filled with the Holy Spirit speaks in different languages. These different languages are different ways of witnessing to Christ, such as humility, poverty, patience and obedience; we speak in those languages when we reveal in ourselves these virtues to others" (St Anthony of Padua, *Actions Speak Louder than Words*, Sermon Office of the Reading, June 13<sup>th</sup>).

The Holy Spirit makes a difference. As the third person of the Blessed Trinity, the Love between the Father and Son, he is the Lord the Giver of life, the Anointing, the Advocate and the Sanctifier who proceeds from the Father and the Son. He is God.

Does your life feel chaotic, hectic and out of order? Open your heart to the Holy Spirit. Start your day with prayer and quiet not with CNN or MSNBC or FOX NEWS. Do you feel burdened by guilt of sin you committed when you were younger? Let merciful love of the Holy Spirit come upon you. Go to confession to a priest. This is because as a representative and collaborator of the Apostles, the Lord has empowered him. “Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained”(John 20:22-23).

Do you feel lifeless and dry? Ask for the help of Holy Spirit. “I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land; thus you shall know that I am the LORD (Ezekiel 37:14).

Do you feel burdened by weakness or a stubborn addiction? Do you feel acedia or weakness when it comes to prayer? Seek the help of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God says, “the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings” (Romans 8:26).

Do you struggle with discord and disunity in your family or in your parish? Tell it to the Holy Spirit. St Irenaeus counsels us, “Like dry flour, which cannot become one lump of dough, one loaf of bread, without moisture, we who are many could not become one in Christ Jesus without the water that comes down from heaven” (St Irenaeus, *The Sending of the Holy Spirit, The Treatise Against Heresies*, Second Reading, Office of the Reading on Pentecost).

Putting it all in perspective, the descent of the Holy Spirit crowns the work of salvation. On the point, St Irenaeus wrote,

The Lord God had promised through the prophets that in these last days he would pour out his Spirit on his servants and handmaids, and that they would prophesy. So when the Son of God became the Son of Man, the Spirit also descended upon him, becoming accustomed in this way to dwelling with the human race, to living in men and to inhabiting God's creation. The Spirit accomplished the Father's will in men who had grown old in sin, and gave them new life in Christ. Luke says that the Spirit came down on the disciples at Pentecost, after the Lord's ascension, with power to open the gates of life to all nations and to make known to them the new covenant. So it was that men of every language joined in singing one song of praise to God, and scattered tribes, restored to unity by the Spirit, were offered to the Father as the first-fruits of all the nations (St Irenaeus, *Ibid.*)

May we make ours this timeless song of invocation of the Holy Spirit.

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator, come from thy bright heavenly throne, Come, take possession of our souls, And make them all thine own. Thou who art called the Paraclete, Best gift of God above, The living spring, the living fire, Sweet unction and true love. O guide our minds with thy blest light, with love our hearts inflame; And with thy strength, which ne'er decays, Confirm our mortal frame. Far from us drive our deadly foe; True peace unto us bring; And through all perils lead us safe, Beneath thy sacred wing (Attr, Rabanus Maurus 766-856).

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