

PENTECOST AND THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

(J.F.M.H. – 7.6.2018)

The Jewish feast of Pentecost, the second most important of the great Jewish feasts, was also known as ‘the feast of the harvest and the first fruits.’ The Jews would have celebrated it with social gatherings, and freewill offerings as the Lord God blessed them with a plentiful harvest, and by rejoicing before God. (Deuteronomy 16.11) One can find a reference to the way Pentecost was celebrated in (*Tobit 2.1.*) Between the death of Christ on the Cross, and the Jewish feast of Pentecost there was great tension in Jerusalem. What had happened to Christ was a frightening example of what was likely to happen to Christ’s main supporters once they could be identified. What practicing Jew could possibly fail to imagine the way the Jewish spiritual leaders were likely to act towards them? Still, because of the importance of this feast it was not surprising that Our Lady and the apostles should gather together in the upper room (the same room chosen by Christ for the Last Supper to celebrate it.

An account of what happened at this particular Jewish Pentecostal meal is given in Acts 2.1-14. *“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard in his own language. And they were amazed and wondered saying “Are not all these men Galileans? And how is it that we hear each of us in his own native language?”* The Holy Spirit was at work in the Church as the vivifier. The life He gave started to have immediate effect and the infant Church grew that day by about 3000 people.

Pope John Paul II reminds us that the ‘Apostolic Church’ was born on the day of Pentecost. It was when the Holy Spirit came down on Our Lady and the Apostles. His coming consecrated them as the chosen witnesses of Christ. It gave them the courage and strength to go out and proclaim the good news they had witnessed by His life. A similar thing happens when we are confirmed. By the chrism we are given we acquire a quite particular relationship directly with Jesus Christ. We are officially consecrated to Him as witnesses to the Church and to the world. Though as always God never takes away our free will. We are left to co-operate or not as we choose. If we choose to be witnesses to Christ, the Holy Spirit gives what grace is needed. God knows what each of us is capable of at any given moment, and provides the particular grace required. However we have to pray for the fruits of that help, and co-operate with it. This is so whatever form our witnessing takes.

This coming of the Holy Spirit did not happen only once in the Church, it is a perpetual thing. It occurs continually in every generation, and will do so until the end of time. The power of the Holy Spirit was manifest in the upper room at the introduction of the Eucharist, again in the same place, when the apostles met the risen Christ, and still in the same room at Pentecost when they experienced the Holy Spirit in the form of parted tongues of fire. Then the Apostolic Church was born, and by the power of the Holy Spirit their witness was effective. The Church showed it had life and had it abundantly. This abundant life has been a hallmark in every age, so that the faith has spread to the entire world.

The witness given by St. Peter on that first day of the birth of the Church was heard not only in the language Peter normally spoke as a man from Galilee, as all who heard him, heard in their own language. Today, as on that day, of the Christian Pentecost, the witness to Christ is still presented in every language under the sun. Every time a priest consecrates the bread and wine during the Mass, the Holy Spirit empowers the priest, and the bread and wine become the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church is built up as body, through the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The vivifying power of this Sacrament is inexhaustible, in the Holy Spirit. The Church lives from it, in the Holy Spirit, with the very life of her Lord. Pope John Paul II also reminded us that *“the Eucharist is at one and the same time Christ’s sacrifice and the Church’s sacrifice, because in it Christ unites the Church with His redemptive work and lets the Church share in His oblation.”* We are the members of the Church and act and offer this sacrifice to God the Almighty Father in, with and through our Head, Jesus Christ.

St. Augustiine in one of his sermons reminded us, **“God willed to created us without us, but without us, did not will to Save us.”** To receive God’s Mercy, we must admit our faults, and be sorry for them. The Moral life of Christians is sustained by the ‘Gifts of the Holy Spirit. There are seven of these, which the Catechism of the Catholic Church lists as (1) **wisdom**, (2) **understanding**, (3) **counsel**, (4) **fortitude**, (5) **knowledge**, (6) **piety** and (7) **fear of the Lord**. We were created by God to know love and serve Him in this world and to be happy with Him forever in the next.

St Peter in His 2nd Letter reminds us of the part we need to play in the gifts given us by God, *“May you have grace and peace as you come to know our Lord more and more. By the divine power He has given us all the things that we need for life and for true devotion, bringing us to know God himself, who has called us by His own glory and goodness. In making these gifts, He a given us the guarantee of something very great and wonderful to come: through them we will be able to share the divine nature and to escape corruption in a world that is sunk in vice. **But to attain this, you will have to do your utmost yourselves, adding goodness to the faith that you have, understanding to your goodness, self- control to your understanding, patience to your self-control, true devotion to your patience, kindness towards your fellow men to your devotion, and to this kindness, love.***

PRAYER FOR THE

SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

O Lord Jesus Christ Who, before ascending into heaven did promise to send the Holy Spirit to finish your work in the souls of Your Apostles and Disciples, deign to grant the same Holy Spirit to me that He may perfect in my soul, the work of Your grace and Your love. Grant me the Spirit of Wisdom that I may despise the perishable things of this world and aspire only after the things that are eternal, the Spirit of Understanding to enlighten my mind with the light of Your divine truth, the Spirit on Counsel that I may ever choose the surest way of pleasing God and gaining heaven, the Spirit of Fortitude that I may bear my cross with You and that I may overcome with courage all the obstacles that oppose my salvation, the Spirit of Knowledge that I may know God and know myself and grow perfect in the science of the Saints, the Spirit of Piety that I may find the service of God sweet and amiable, and the Spirit of Fear of God, that I may be filled with a loving reverence towards God and may dread in any way to displease Him. Mark me, dear Lord with the sign of Your true disciples, and animate me in all things with Your Spirit. Amen.