

Title: The Power of Pentecost

Subtitle: We cannot neglect the importance of receiving the power of the Holy Spirit.

Introduction:

Today, we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. On this day, something so powerful happened that the Church fathers commemorated this day from the beginning. It was on this day the outpouring of the Holy Spirit transformed the early disciples from a fearful group hiding behind locked doors into a robust, dynamic community that proclaimed the Gospel to all nations. Therefore, they did not want the Church to sell itself short by forgetting the source of its power that made them such a dynamic expression of the body of Christ on earth.

I grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, and there was a story with a funny twist that illustrates this point. The wise Superior Mother was dying. The nuns gathered around her bed, trying to make her comfortable. They gave her some warm milk to drink, but she refused it. Then one nun took the glass back to the kitchen. Remembering a bottle of whiskey received as a gift the previous Christmas, she opened it and poured a generous amount into the warm milk. Back at Mother Superior's bed, she held the glass to her lips. Mother drank a little, then a little more. Then, before they knew it, she had drunk the whole glass of milk down to the last drop. "Mother, Mother," the nuns cried, "give us some wisdom before you die!" She raised herself up out of bed with a pious look on her face, and pointing out the window, she exclaimed, "Don't sell that cow!" ☺

Transition: I share that story because it was as if the Church Fathers took one drink from the milk of the Spirit that was

poured out on the Day of Pentecost and said, “Don’t sell that cow!”

The power of the Holy Spirit that was given to the Church was something we should never forget. Before leaving his disciples on the night he was betrayed, Jesus said, ***“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth.”***¹ This “Helper” is also described as “An Advocate and Comforter.” Later, after Jesus was raised from the dead, he ***“ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father, for you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”***²

In obedience to this command, Luke carefully describes how the disciples were ***“...all together in one place”***³ as they prayed in ***“one accord.”***⁴ ***“When suddenly, there was a sound like the roaring of a mighty wind that came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.”***⁵ The manifestation of the Holy Spirit was described as ***“...divided tongues, as of fire, that appeared among them and rested on each of them.”***⁶ It was such an unusual event that a crowd of individuals from every known nation ***“..heard them proclaiming in their own languages the mighty works of God.”***⁷ ***“Amazed and perplexed, they asked, “What does this mean?”***⁸

¹ John 14:16

² Acts 1:4-5

³ Acts 2:1

⁴ Acts 1:14

⁵ Acts 2:2

⁶ Acts 2:3

⁷ Acts 2:11

⁸ Acts 2:12

As you listen to the events that took place on this day, don't you also find yourself feeling much the same way as the crowd who was "bewildered and astonished"⁹ when they witnessed these things? Admittedly, these events were strange and unusual, but it was so authentic and powerful that they had to take them seriously. But if this experience was from God, then "***What does this mean***" for you and me? Could the Holy Spirit, who Jesus described as our "helper, comforter, and advocate," really live in us and be with us?

To my own astonishment, I had to experience it for myself before I could believe it, and I did. It happened when I was a freshman at Montreat College. I had questions about Jesus. I wanted to know if he could be more than a vague hope or superstition. Then one day, I ran into a person who shared his faith in Jesus Christ, and he offered to pray for me. When he did, the hand of Jesus touched me, and I was filled with the Holy Spirit. The experience was personal and life-changing. From then on, the Gospel became like a fire in my soul that was personal and life-changing.

One of my favorite stories that illustrate the importance of the Holy Spirit occurred as a missionary was preaching in India. By the side of the podium was an oil lamp, by which he could read the lessons and notes for his sermon. But as he did so, the oil in the lamp next to him ran dry, and the light began to dim and flicker, and the wick began to exude a toxic smoke. Then, when the preacher started to cough, he pointed at the lamp and said, "This is what happens when we try to live the Christian life

⁹ Acts 2:7

in our own strength without the oil of the Holy Spirit. It is not only exhausting, it is futile.

We are meant to live the Christian life with an anointing from God that gives us strength and the ability to produce fruit—fruit that is so attractive it makes us the salt of the earth.

The Jewish Feast of Pentecost originally celebrated the giving of the law—a covenant written in stone by the hand of God. Yet God had promised that one day he would make a new covenant with the house of Israel—a covenant written not in stone but on the tablets of human hearts. So Ezekiel prophesied that God would one day “...*give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; (and would) remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*”¹⁰ This prophecy was fulfilled when God poured out his Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. And Peter said, “*This promise is for you and your children and to all who are afar off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.*”¹¹

The difficulty for us as we attempt to apply these promises is that we are so prone to accept the nominal Christian experience as the norm. It is so easy to go through all the proper motions, say all the right words, know when to sit, stand or kneel in our services, and still miss what a dynamic, living relationship with God is all about.

Our culture conditions us to be content with being entertained spectators. So the idea of possessing a passionate, rushing wind, tongues-of-fire faith seems out of reach. We prefer, instead, cautious respectability. Yet many wonder why

¹⁰ Ezekiel 36:26

¹¹ Acts 2:39

life where things feel “manageable” leaves them feeling dry and spiritually thirsty.

We must remember that the disciples were people like you and me. Most often, they struggled to understand and live the words that Christ spoke. And we, like Peter, have repeatedly failed with the best of intentions. Therefore, we need to take seriously our Lord’s promise in the Gospel today when Jesus said, ***“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and let the one who believes in me drink.”***¹²

The living water that he gives shall be in us ***“a fountain of living water.”***¹³ These waters bring life and make the things we confess in our creeds more than just dusty relics of Church history. Now they are a living, breathing, life-giving reality, for when the Holy Spirit comes, he will ***“take the things of Jesus and show them to us.”***¹⁴ So now, when I say, ***“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, and the forgiveness of sins,”***¹⁵ it means more than just a set of orthodox words. I can now see that the disciples’ story has become my story. Now we can live the Savior’s story: that fisherfolk, tax collectors, and ordinary people like you and me can open our mouths and let the Holy Spirit speak through us. Then comes the wonder of wonders, for he takes what we offer him and begins to change our lives, making our lives a light for others. So let us pray with earnestness, “Come, Holy Spirit, come. Fill our hearts with your love so that the light of the Gospel may shine brightly through us.” Amen.

¹² John 7:37-38

¹³ John 7:38b.

¹⁴ John 16:14

¹⁵ Part of the Apostles Creed that deals with believing in the Holy Spirit