

On Pentecost Sunday we celebrated not only the feast of the Holy Spirit but also the birthday of the church. Jesus had chosen 12 men, instructed them for three years, put one of them, Peter, in charge, and then had them wait for the coming of the Spirit in the upper room. After the Pentecostal anointing, the apostles went out and preached with bold proclamation. And the church was born. Everywhere they went, the disciples formed communities of followers of Jesus, consecrated bishops, priests, and deacons to assure the continuity of these communities, and continued the bold proclamation.

But there were those who wanted to destroy the church. The Jewish leaders tried — and they failed. The Roman emperors tried for three centuries — and they failed. Julian the Apostate Emperor died, so legend says, murmuring “Galilean, you have won, you have won.” In the 16th and 17th centuries, English rulers promised that they would eradicate the “papist religion” from Britain.

Today, there are more Catholics in churches on any Sunday than Anglicans. In the 18th century,



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Voltaire, leader of the French Encyclopedists, railed against the church: “Crush the infamous thing.” The revolutionaries thought they had. Yet within the 50 years after the French Revolution, more active religious orders arose in France than in any other comparable period in church history.

Thirty-five years ago I read in a St. Louis paper a citation from an Italian journal: “Unless it changes, the church in the United States will be annihilated in 20 years.” That would have been 1992. And we are still here. There were problems.

And later we learned of the most serious scandal ever in the history of the American church,

that of clerical sexual abuses. Yet the visit of Pope Benedict to the United States last month indicated a new hope and a new strength for the Catholic Church here.

Enemies of the church have always tried to destroy it. But they always fail. In the early 20th century, the dissenting scholar Alfred Loisy remarked with bitter sarcasm: Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, and what he got was a church! But that, of course, is not the Catholic view. We as Catholics believe what St. Augustine wrote: “Whoever does not have the church as Mother, will not have God as Father.”

The church is the bark of Peter, the Mystical Body of Christ, the bride of the Holy Spirit. It is God’s will for us. Through the church, we have the Scriptures and their authentic explanation; the sacraments, all seven of God’s channels of grace, willed by Jesus to help us on our way to heaven; and the examples of lived holiness — such as John Paul II, Mother Teresa, Padre Pio,

Thérèse of Lisieux, and many, many others.

At the end of April, the Medical Commission of the Congregation for Saints declared the authenticity of a miracle due to the intercession of John Henry Newman.

An American deacon by the name of Jack Sullivan from Marshfield, Mass., was cured of a serious spinal cord injury. There is no natural explanation for the cure. This opens the door to the beatification of Cardinal Newman, a man who deeply loved the church.

Newman was the foremost intellectual of England in the first part of the 19th century — an Oxford don, a brilliant scholar, an historian and researcher, a leader of the Oxford Movement of the Anglican Church. His printed tracts were purchased in the streets and read at table in English homes. People flocked to hear his sermons at his parish church. He read them word for word but their profundity and the expression of the ideas in

the most beautiful prose of the century captivated his hearers.

But Newman had doubts. He realized that his “Three Branch Theory”, i.e. that the church of Jesus was divided into three separate but equal branches — Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican — did not really reflect the prayer of the Lord “That they all may be one.” In 1845, he entered the Catholic Church. He lost his privileged place in English social, political, and ecclesial life; he was ostracized by even his closest friends. But Newman recognized that he had found the Pearl of Great Price. He rejoiced in the authentic Eucharist, all the sacraments, the unity with Peter. He once remarked how wonderful it was that he could visit the most magnificent Catholic cathedral or the poorest Catholic country church and find in each the Eucharist Lord.

So we celebrated the birthday of the church on Pentecost. And we were reminded that the church is for us our home.

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## New Pentecost ... new evangelization ... new springtime!

A bumper sticker I’ve seen states: “No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know peace.” I believe it is safe to say: “No Pentecost, no evangelization. No evangelization, no springtime.” And: “New Pentecost, new evangelization. New evangelization, new springtime.” The church has alluded to this for years and as recently as last month.

Archbishop Pietro Sambi, the Holy See’s ambassador to the United States, expressed his hope that Pope Benedict XVI’s recent visit would bring “a new light, a new Pentecost to the church.” The pope himself prayed for this at St. Patrick’s Cathedral: “Let us implore from God the grace of a new Pentecost for the church in America. May tongues of fire, combining burning love of God and neighbor with zeal for the spread of Christ’s kingdom, descend on all present!” he exclaimed. This was the second time he did so during his trip. He recognized that “the Spirit never ceases to pour out his abundant gifts, to awaken new vocations and missions, and to guide the church, as our Lord promised in this morning’s Gospel, into the fullness of truth.”

Did the pope mention this new Pentecost simply due to the forthcoming celebration of Pentecost? Surely, the solemnity of Pentecost was on his mind — a special feast too often overlooked, perhaps because we see it more as the “end” of the Easter season, rather than as the “beginning” of a renewed church ready to go



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out into the whole world with Good News. (And unfortunately, when the purpose of Pentecost is missed, so too are its blessings.) But, I believe the pope’s repeated references to a new Pentecost come from a conviction he has held for some time now: he believes we need it! And he sees it already happening.

One sign of this new Pentecost is the rise of various movements and ecclesial communities throughout the world which have put the church in movement, that is, in motion, on the go, in the 20th and 21st centuries. Pope Benedict XVI has taken notice. In 1998, as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, he inaugurated the World Congress of the Ecclesial Movements in Rome, delivering a talk titled “Church Movements and their Place in Theology.” In 1999, he spoke to bishops gathered in Rome for a seminar on “The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops,” touching on topics such as the relation between old and new charisms, the institutional and the charismatic dimensions of the church, the church’s mission in a non-Christian society, and more. In 2006, Pope Benedict

XVI met with leaders of various ecclesial movements and new communities. He clearly has noticed new outpourings of the Holy Spirit in the church and the world, and the tremendous fruit they are bearing. In the above-mentioned speeches, compiled in a book titled *New Outpourings of The Spirit*, he points out that the Holy Spirit is “at it again.” For me personally, it was a marvelous event when at the beginning of the ’70s, I first came into close contact with movements like the Neo-Catechumens, Comunione e Liberazione, and the Focolarini and thus experienced the enthusiasm and verve with which they lived out their faith, what had been vouchsafed to them ... Suddenly here was something nobody had planned on. The Holy Spirit had, so to say, spoken up for himself again ... In young people especially, the faith was surging up in its entirety, with no ifs and buts, with no excuses or way out, experienced as a favor and as a precious life-giving gift. Not wishing to ignore “what the Spirit is saying to the churches,” (cf. *Rev 2:1-3:22*) but wanting to discern the movements’ proper place and impact on the church and the world today, Pope Benedict XVI has stated that “The church must make the most of these realities, and at the same time she must guide them with pastoral wisdom, so that with the variety of their different gifts they may continue in the best possible way to building up the community” pointing out practi-

cal criteria that may be useful to both pastors and the movements themselves.

Pope Benedict XVI is not alone. Pope John Paul II too had noticed this new move of the Spirit. He too recognized the need for a new Pentecost, leading to a new evangelization which, in turn, leads to a new springtime for Christianity. So did Pope John XXIII, who prayed at the eve of the Second Vatican Council for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the church “as by a new Pentecost.” Why is the Holy Spirit “at it again?” What is the purpose of the new manifestations of His powerful presence in people’s personal lives and in the life of the church? It is to renew the face of the earth. (cf. *Ps 104:30*) This Pentecost, properly understood, is new, not in the sense of “doing away with the old” and bringing about something “totally novel” and “unheard of” — for the Spirit of God would never usher in a “new Gospel” or encourage faith expressions that are contrary to the living tradition of the church. Rather, “new” is to be understood as “renewed,” “reviving,” “bringing about again,” fostering, welcoming and ushering in the same type of life-changing outpouring of the Holy Spirit that took place in Jerusalem almost 2,000 years ago when the first disciples received “power from on high” in what remains one of those most powerfully significant events in the life of the church. And it was not meant to be a one-time occurrence,

but a living reality for every Christian and faith community, so that Christ’s promise may be realized in every one of us: “You will receive power from on high when the Holy Spirit comes, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth.” (*Acts 1:8*)

That was the purpose of the first Pentecost. That is the purpose of a new Pentecost! The “New Pentecost” is needed for a “New Evangelization.” It is aimed at allowing the Holy Spirit to do for us what he did for the early church, changing frightened and timid believers into confident and caring evangelizers, willing to go the extra mile — even to the ends of the earth — and to pay the ultimate price — martyrdom — for the sake of spreading the Gospel and establishing the church throughout the world, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles. We each need “power from on high” to fully live the life of discipleship and become effective witnesses of Christ — at home, in our neighborhoods and work places, even to the ends of the earth.

Then will our “New Evangelization” bring about a “New Springtime” in our own spirits, in the Church, and in the world.

I encourage you to read the talks given by Pope Benedict XVI in the U.S. at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

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