

## **Homily Pentecost Sunday 2008**

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My sisters and brothers in Christ:

Pentecost Sunday marks the conclusion of the fifty days of the Easter season and the beginning of the mission of the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the day when the Church officially became public.

That day, as we just heard in the 1<sup>st</sup> reading of today's Mass, the Apostles received the Holy Spirit. It was the beginning of a great adventure for the Apostles and for the whole world.

In today's passage of the Gospel, Jesus tells the Apostles that His mission, given to Him by his Father, is now their mission. He passes on a big responsibility. At the time, they couldn't even imagine how great and important it will be. They only realized later on, after Pentecost.

Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained"

The action of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the Apostles was evident as it was in the life of the first Christians. The Acts of the Apostles talk to us about the many manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit. It was felt through conversions, miracles, expansion of the Church all over the known world, etc. People were surprised: 'They were astounded, and in amazement', in today's 1<sup>st</sup> reading of the Mass because they were able to understand the Apostles in their own languages.

Well, now at the beginning of the Third Millennium we feel the need for the action of the Holy Spirit to help us in the New Evangelization of the world.

Pope Benedict XVI just reminded us of the contributions of the Catholic Church to American society. "Today the Catholic community you serve is one of the largest in the world and one of the most influential". He also reminded us of our weaknesses and failures and challenged us to continue the healing process.

It is true. There are so many examples of the contribution of the Catholic Church to our society in the areas of education, health care, family life, social justice, service to others, etc.

Just this past week, with the reaction of our city to the tragic fire at Our Lady of the Lake University, we were made aware of the long standing contribution of the Sisters of Divine Providence to our community. We keep them today in our prayers in a special way as they start the process of rebuilding their main building at the West Commerce Campus.

But at the same time, the Pope's visit was a call to renew our evangelization mission: a call to renew our apostolic zeal, with the humility of knowing that we are sinners and that our faith is a gift from God.

There is no doubt that we have a great message to share with the people of our time as the Pope reminded us: "We can and must believe, with the late Pope John Paul II, that God is preparing a new springtime for Christianity (cf. "Redemptoris Missio," 86). What is needed above all at this time in the history of the church in America is a renewal of that apostolic zeal ..." (Benedict XVI, Washington, DC, 4/16/08).

Today on Pentecost day, let's ask for the grace to renew our apostolic zeal. Let's remember that we are called to be personally involved in the New Evangelization of America. Yes, God is calling each one of us to proclaim the truths of the Gospel to our society.

It doesn't mean that we are going to be so absolutely perfect and make no mistakes, or that we are going to pretend to be so spiritual that we have to reject and try to escape from the world in which we live.

No, it means that God is calling us to engage ourselves in the "New Evangelization" of our society. It means that we proclaim the dignity of the human person and the human body and put everything to the service and glory of God.

We don't want to remain passive any longer. We want to have the confidence that God dwells in our soul, that the mission Christ has given to us is carried out by our words and our deeds and not remain hidden underneath our fear, our desire to be like everyone else, or just not to feel uncomfortable.

It is not a matter of feeling superior to others or *holier-than-Thou* but a matter of sharing with them the gift of faith that we have received.

This is an aspect of our faith that became clear on Pentecost Day. The Church is a community; our faith is a public gift that we have received, not to impose it on them, but to invite them to understand it and if they want to, to enjoy it, as we do.

In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: "In Christianity, there can be no room for purely private religion: Christ is the savior of the world, and, as members of his body and sharers in his prophetic, priestly and royal "munera," we cannot separate our love for him from our commitment to the building up of the church and the extension of his kingdom. To the extent that religion becomes a purely private affair, it loses its very soul." Pope Benedict XVI, Washington, DC, 4/16/08

The faith was never meant to be private. Jesus came to gather a "kingdom of God," which is the Church. It is a "people of God." Not just a group of individuals, but a people living a shared life of prayer, worship, tradition, good works. Jesus taught his followers to pray "Our" Father. Even our individual prayer recognizes that we are connected to one another in the Church.

We don't think up our own faith or make it up ourselves. The faith of the Church always precedes us. When we come to be baptized, or when we are brought by our parents for baptism, the Church is there before us. Again, this comes from Jesus -- we don't just confess our faith in Jesus to the skies or to God privately. Our confession takes place in the Church, which is a public community.

That it's also clearly shown on Pentecost day. The people hear the preaching, they are cut to the heart, which means they believe the Word they have heard in their hearts. But that isn't the end of it. They must confess their faith in the sacrament of baptism. They must repent and be baptized. The two always go hand in hand. A personal and private call and a public acceptance of it.

The act of faith begins in our hearts, but it is always made publicly. From this public confession of faith flows the responsibility to try to live our faith in a worthy manner.

This is obviously the most difficult part. And for that to happen we need one basic disposition: docility to the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

To the Holy Spirit is attributed the work of our sanctification. Progress in our journey of faith is made through the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and our own personal effort to correspond to the grace of God.

So, two resolutions, today: the desire to share the gift of faith with the people of our time and the commitment to do our best in responding to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit to be faithful, reject sin and search for the grace of God, especially in the Sacraments of the Church.

Let's go to the intercession of Mary, our Blessed Mother, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, as we ask the Holy Spirit to help us renew our apostolic zeal and to begin again in our effort to live out our faith to continue the mission received by the Apostles on Pentecost Day.

Amen.