



Homily Diocesan Red Mass
St. Patrick Cathedral
Fort Worth, Texas
September 30, 2008

The Most Rev. José H. Gomez, S.T.D.
Archbishop of San Antonio

Readings (Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit)

Acts 2:1–11

1 Corinthians 12:3b–7, 12–13

John 15:26–27; 16:12–15

My brother, Bishop Vann; my dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus:

We hear tonight of the Spirit that came down from heaven upon the apostles and Our Lady; “The Spirit that comes with a sound like “the rush of a mighty wind.”

These words strike pretty close to home, don’t they? Just a few weeks ago, we heard the roaring winds of Hurricane Ike, and we felt their devastation. And we continue to offer our prayers and charity to our fellow Texans and others suffering in Ike’s wake. I’m thinking tonight, too, about the winds of turmoil and confusion blowing through Wall Street and our nation’s capitol. Let us pray that our leaders seek the courage and wisdom they need in this time of trial.

But the mighty wind we hear about in the Word of God tonight is of a much different sort. It is not the wind of destruction, but the Spirit of a new creation. It is not the wind of chaos, but the Spirit of communion.

The Spirit that comes upon the apostles is the Spirit of truth that Christ promised to send to his Church. We hear that promise in our Gospel reading tonight. The Spirit is given to guide his Church. That the Church might speak with the authority of Christ and always stay true to his teachings.

This same Spirit is given to each of us in baptism, as the breath of new life. The Spirit gives us our identity, makes us who we are. St. Paul tells us that very simply but very powerfully tonight. By the Spirit we are able to know Jesus as our Lord. By the Spirit, we are made members of his body, the Church.

This Church is “catholic,” which means universal, embracing every tribe and people, every tongue and nation. We see that in the reading from Acts.

Our readings tonight, my friends, tells us who we are and what we are called to do. We are Catholics! *¡Somos Católicos!* We are not Jews or Greeks. Slaves or free. Black or

white or Hispanic. Democrats or Republicans or Americans. We may be some these things, too. But we are not these things first or fundamentally. In God's eyes—which are the only eyes that matter—you are his sons and daughters first. And you belong to his family, his Church, which is one and holy, catholic and apostolic.

Now, what does this mean for you who have been entrusted with the very special vocation of public service? Each of us has been given the Spirit, Paul tells us, not for our own sake, but for the sake of God's plan of salvation. Your particular task as a Catholic in public life is to seek his kingdom of love. To promote the truths and values of the Gospel in every aspect of our society—from our government, to our economy, to our culture.

But therein lies the problem, my friends. For we live in a society that has grown increasingly hostile to the public expression of religious beliefs.

When Pope Benedict was in America this past April, Bishop Vann and I had the privilege to meet and pray with him. Benedict understands our country at a deep level. And he wanted to talk about the growing pressures American Catholics face—to divorce faith from life, to treat religion as a private affair, and to ignore the teachings of the Gospel and the Church in our work in the world.

Allow me to share something the Pope told us. He said: “Is it consistent to profess our beliefs in church on Sunday, and then during the week to promote business practices or medical procedures contrary to those beliefs? Is it consistent for practicing Catholics to ignore or exploit the poor and the marginalized, to promote sexual behavior contrary to Catholic moral teaching, or to adopt positions that contradict the right to life of every human being from conception to natural death? Any tendency to treat religion as a private matter must be resisted. Only when their faith permeates every aspect of their lives do Christians become truly open to the transforming power of the Gospel.”

My friends, the Pope is absolutely right. You can't let society make you choose between living your Catholic faith and serving our brothers and sisters in public life. We can't accept the unholy compromises of a privatized religion, a faith forced to remain irrelevant to the most important questions we face as a nation.

There is no necessary or inherent conflict between being Catholic and being American. In fact, I believe that America will never fulfill its promise, its true purpose in the providential plan of God, until Catholics allow their faith to fully “permeate every aspect of their lives.”

And I want to suggest that your response to these challenges must begin in deepening your Catholic identity. You need to become more Catholic, even as our society pressures you to become less.

This means forming your conscience. The gift of conscience is closely related to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Conscience is the law of God written in our hearts. Conscience is the

voice of God speaking inside us. Calling us to love. Calling us to do what is good and to fight what is evil.

We have to train ourselves so we can hear his voice. How we do this? First, we have to have a strong desire to know what is true and to do what is right. We have to be people prayer. Ask for his Spirit to guide you. Ask him to help you always to do the right thing.

The saints always say: that when we pray, we talk to God, and when we read the Scriptures, he talks to us. So we need to be people who spend time each day reading the Scriptures.

And we need to listen carefully to the living interpretation and application of God's Word in the teachings of the Church. In the teachings of the Pope and the bishops. The Spirit guarantees that the Church teaches with the voice of Christ and proclaims his truth in every age. So we need to listen carefully and study these teachings and let them illuminate everything we do.

My friends, your special calling is to bring the truths of the Gospel to bear on our economic, political, and cultural life. Don't let anyone tell you that these religious truths are contrary or irrelevant to the concerns of our secular democracy.

Here in Texas, where the Gospel was proclaimed nearly two centuries before the Declaration of Independence, we know the truth. The truth is that there were preachers in this country long before there were politicians. There was the Church before there was the State.

And the proclamation of the Gospel shaped our nation's founding values and documents. America is a founded upon a belief in the Creator, who endows men and women with freedoms and rights that no man and no government can take away—the first of these being the right to life. America is founded upon a belief in the existence of truth. In the dignity of the human person. In justice. And in the common good that flows from loving our neighbor as ourselves.

These are Catholic values, Christian values. And they are American values.

But right now, my brothers and sisters, we face a tragic situation. The law of our land today permits the routine and ongoing destruction of more than a million innocent human lives each year. Our Catholic conscience cannot remain silent in the face of a situation so contrary to our founders' ideals and so repugnant to the law of God.

Again, this is not a "religious" or "Catholic" issue. It concerns the most fundamental questions in any human civilization: Who gets to live and who doesn't—and who gets to decide this question? Can one's rights or freedoms include the right and freedom to extinguish the life of one who is weaker?

As we continue our celebration of the Eucharist and our invocation of the Holy Spirit, let us pray for the courage to stand up for the truths of our faith and the soul of our nation.

Let us make a promise to ourselves and to our Lord. That we will never deny the teachings of his Church—either by our words or by our actions. That we will work with all our strength to promote these teachings in this great state and in this great country.

Let us rededicate ourselves tonight to building a new Texas and a new America. A land where it is easier to love. A land where life is cherished and welcomed—from the child in the womb to the elderly and the handicapped, to the immigrant seeking a new life for his family.

And I pray that Our Lady of Guadalupe, Queen of the Americas, will intercede for you and watch over you always.