

Pentecost 2019

Dearly Beloved,

Today we celebrate the great feast of Pentecost, the day on which, fifty days after the Resurrection, and ten days after the Ascension, the Holy Spirit descended upon Our Lady and the Apostles as the Lord Jesus had promised. He descended to teach them the full truth of the Gospel, to give them the courage to preach that truth, and to dwell in their souls in a new and powerful way.

Today's feast has two dimensions to it, as the texts of the Mass make clear: the ecclesial and the personal. In the first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear of the effect of the Spirit's coming upon the Apostles—once afraid of even being associated with Christ, they now profess His death and resurrection openly and publicly before all those gathered at Jerusalem for the feast. As at the time of the Passion and Resurrection, the Christian Pentecost coincided with one of the three major Jewish festivals, such that all adult males were required to come to the city to take part. Jews from all over the diaspora descended upon the city, not knowing that the Lord would use the moment to manifest Himself more fully, and begin the preaching of the Gospel to the entire world.

The gift of the Holy Spirit both clarified and perfected the teaching the Apostles had learned from Christ, thus enabling St. Peter to preach the Lord's death and resurrection as foretold in the Scriptures, and its importance for all mankind. Moreover, the Apostles not only received the doctrine to be preached throughout the world, they also received the courage to preach it, and these two gifts—doctrine and fortitude—remain the principal gifts the Holy Spirit gives to the Church as a whole, so that all may hear the Gospel in its fullness and purity.

The Gospel, in complementarity to the reading from Acts, speaks more of the personal aspect of Pentecost, emphasizing the Holy Trinity's coming into souls, to rest there and take up His abode. The purpose of the apostolic preaching is this—that God may dwell in human souls as fully as possible, given our capacity. Jesus says that anyone who keeps His word will experience the indwelling of the Trinity—literally, we will come and make a room with him.

Thus, the beginning of the spiritual life in Christ is to keep His word—to turn from sin and live according to the commandments; to believe His doctrines and to live by them. When we turn from sin and remove ourselves from occasions of sin, then we not only begin to live a life of holiness, the Holy Trinity comes to dwell in our souls. Through grace, we are made capable to this amazing gift and we become a resting place for God on this earth—God becomes the guest of our soul.

The literal phrase from today's Gospel which describes the indwelling is the Latin, '*mansionem facere.*' This Latin word '*mansio,*' transliterated as mansion, should remind us of another verse in John's Gospel, where Jesus says that He goes to prepare a place for us, for in His Father's house, there are many mansions. The old English translation is somewhat misleading, for *mansio* is equivalent to a room—thus in the Father's house, there are many rooms.

St. Thomas Aquinas, following Augustine, interprets the rooms of the Father's house, not as places in heaven, but as our souls. When Christ ascended, He sent the Holy Spirit to prepare our souls as rooms where He, the Father and the Spirit could dwell, and to further prepare each soul chosen by God to be worthy of heaven—to enlarge the heart so that it is ready to love God fully in heaven.

The Gospel, then, speaks of an initial stage in which we seek to do God's will by turning from sin, followed by another stage in which the Holy Trinity comes to dwell in us and our spiritual focus becomes not the avoidance of sin, but the making our souls a home so that God will never leave. As St. Augustine says, "*even were God to say to us, 'Enjoy carnal delights, and sin as much as you wish, you shall not be cast into hell, but this only, you shall be with me,' we shudder at the thought*" and do not dread hell as much as the thought of giving offense to

the Lord and being separated from Him. This is a positive endeavor rather than a negative one—as St. Paul says, the charity of God has been poured into our hearts, and now we must respond in kind—we wish our love to be fervent enough that our guest will come and never depart.

And this prepares us for heaven, for it makes our hearts grow so they will be ready to know and love God entirely in the Kingdom of heaven. Not only that: the delight of knowing and loving God now and living in such a way that He will dwell in us more and more fully moves us to share the Gospel with others and work to free them from the slavery and idolatry that binds so many in today's world.

So, on this holy day, we do well to consider whether we work at making our souls a worthy room from God to dwell in. When we await the arrival of guests, if we truly delight in their company, we prepare our houses to receive them, that they may stay as long as they wish. We buy them food and drink which they like; we provide comfortable furniture to foster long conversation; and we even prepare a bed, should we be fortunate enough to have them spend the night. In the spiritual life, God comes as a guest through sanctifying grace; He is present to us more or less based upon the intensity of our love and the effort we make to prepare a place for Him.

The food and drink which He likes are daily prayer and sacrifice; when He finds that in a soul, He comes to visit with frequency. The comfortable chairs for conversation are love of neighbor, for where fraternal charity is, mercy and forgiveness are present, and God can stay and speak at length. The bed we make for Him is the lack of love of this world—every worldly attachment, however small in our eyes, means He is less likely to dwell perpetually; He may remain in grace, but He will be largely unknown to us, for we prefer the world to Him. Love of the world is love of money, possessions, comfort, status, news, sports, entertainment; all things, even good things, which end with this life. In whatever proportion we run to them, God hides from us. But in whatever way we shun this world and give up temporal delights for eternal, spiritual goods, He dwells with us, not only for a time, but for many days on end.

So, then, Pentecost is not about a minimalist view of the Church or of our lives with God. The Holy Spirit did not come to spread ambiguity or mediocrity; He came to bring the fullness of truth and to make possible the height of sanctity. Today, let us renew our commitment to both truth and holiness, inseparably bound as they are. Let us renew our first fervor and seek to let Christ live in us in all fullness, and by so doing, to help renew the Church.

In the book of Revelation, Jesus says to us, *“Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”* Let us prove ourselves worthy of these words, listening to the Spirit in such a way that the Trinity may dwell in us ever more and more, until we come to the house of our Father, the New Jerusalem, to live forever.