

“And His Spirit will be Poured Out”

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Acts 2.1-21; Ezekiel 37.1-14
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Today, on the fiftieth day of the Easter Season, we celebrate the feast of Pentecost. It is the day when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles gathered in Jerusalem, enabling them to preach the Gospel to the people of a multitude of nations who were in the holy city. It is also the birthday of the Christian Church. Although there are other moments that would be good candidates to establish the birth of the Church, the feast of Pentecost has much that argues in its favor. Mainly, we can talk about the beginning of the Church on Pentecost, because this is the day when the apostles and other disciples surprisingly began their mission and public ministry.

Pentecost really was surprising for those disciples. We must remember that even having seen the risen Lord and having received his teachings about the forty days before the Ascension, none of us knew what to expect. They were gathered in the upper room with the Eleven, Mary and other relatives of Jesus, and were in prayer as the Lord had commanded them, when a series of powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit surprised them:

“Suddenly, a great noise coming from the sky, like a strong wind, echoed throughout the house where they were. And tongues of fire appeared to them and were divided, and one settled on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit caused them to speak.”

In many biblical texts the movement of the wind is associated with the Holy Spirit—we only have to think of the first lines of Genesis or the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus in the Gospel of John—so much so that sometimes the same word is used for both concepts. The noise of the wind is the power of the Spirit of God that comes to work in the lives of the disciples and make them instruments of the divine project.

Tongues of fire are also a revealing manifestation. When Saint John the Baptist announced the baptism of repentance, he also announced that another, greater than himself, would come to

baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. At Pentecost the fire of the Holy Spirit openly descended upon the disciples, filling them with his power and enabling them to speak.

Here it is important that we emphasize that the disciples did not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit just to enjoy it themselves, as a very beautiful religious experience or another milestone in their spiritual life. On the contrary, they received the power of the Spirit to carry out the mission of the Church: Announce the Resurrection of Christ and preach the message of salvation to all humanity. And right there they began their task.

Elsewhere in the book, the author of the Acts of the Apostles indicates that the apostles were not people of formal education, which is why the crowd asks: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?" However, in today's reading we hear that the Resurrection was announced to people in many countries who heard Jesus' message in their own languages. It was the gift of the Holy Spirit that made it possible and effective. Everyone was amazed, some mocked, so they asked for an explanation of the strange events.

The apostle Peter offered them an explanation of the phenomenon: God's promises were being fulfilled in their presence: "Also on my male and female servants I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will communicate prophetic messages." It was also in fulfillment of the promise of Jesus Christ that we read in the Gospel text, that of sending the Defender who comes from the Father to be a witness of the Son and to make the disciples his witnesses as well, being guided by the Spirit of truth. Therefore, Peter's preaching tells us that the Day of Pentecost came as a response and fulfillment of God's promises and a sign of a profound change in the life of the world.

Saint Paul also understood that the presence of the Holy Spirit among believers shows a marked change for the entire world. According to the letter to the Romans, not only Jews, not even just human beings, hope for definitive salvation, but also the entire creation: "We know that until now the entire creation complains and suffers like a woman in labor pains." But, according to the apostle, the faithful have the Holy Spirit as a foretaste of that salvation, and we have the strength and help of God through his Spirit to approach him and fulfill the mission that he has entrusted to us. The Holy Spirit helps us, even when we do not know how to pray

properly, he renews us daily until we reach the promised salvation, and gives us the hope of a new life.

Returning to the Day of Pentecost, we see the renewing power of the Holy Spirit in the actions of Peter and the other disciples, as we see how they were transformed into public proclaimers of Christ's Resurrection when a few days earlier they denied the Lord and fled from his presence. As the Psalmist says: "You send your Spirit and they are created; thus you renew the face of the earth."

Today it is also appropriate to think about the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones from the book of Ezekiel that will be read in some of our congregations. God commands the prophet to see a valley full of dry bones and asks him if those bones can come back to life. The Lord explains that the bones of the valley are what remains of the people of Israel after their betrayals and losses, like Peter and the others when they abandoned Jesus. Despite his doubts—Lord, only you know—Ezekiel summoned the Spirit and spoke to the bones and they came to life. Anyone would have said to the Lord "only you know" if God asked him about the disciples, whether they could recover life, but God is faithful, and Peter and the disciples were renewed by the Holy Spirit on the feast of Pentecost.

Although in reality the gift of the Holy Spirit was given once and for all to the Church at Pentecost, its help and power continue in us generation after generation, and we too can be transformed into witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ and participants in the mission of evangelize the whole world. The power of the Spirit is available to every believer in the Lord without regard to race or national origin. It is available for young and old, men and women and that is why we worship the Father with this prayer:

Descend, Spirit of Love, Heavenly Dove,
faithful promise of the Savior, of springing grace.
Revive our little faith, and give us your health;
Benign, guide our foot along paths of virtue.
Comfort our hearts, and always dwell in it;
Grant him the precious gift of always being faithful to you. Amen.