

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Vigil of Pentecost

Vigil of Pentecost

St. Lawrence Martyr Parish Center/ Blessing of Furnishings

June 3, 2017

What a joyous occasion this is! We've gathered to give thanks to God as we bless this new parish center here at St. Lawrence Martyr Parish -especially the new baptismal font, the ambry for the Holy Oils, the tabernacle, and, of course, the altar.

I want to join you in expressing our warmest gratitude for the pastoral love and leadership of your pastor, Father Victor! At the same time, let's express our thanks to Father Binoy for his devoted priestly ministry in our midst together with the parish deacons. This is a moment for me to thank all of you for your leadership, planning participation, and spirit of hospitality. Your partnership with your priests has made possible this great progress.

And how appropriate that, on the Vigil of Pentecost, we call down the Holy Spirit upon this place -even as we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, the Spirit through whom the Church herself was born. This feast and this evening's Scripture readings shed light on what we do.

Yet, on a day when we bless a new building, I have to admit that the biblical story of the Tower of Babel is a cautionary tale! Those builders were talented, dedicated, even ingenious -but the Lord did not bless their building project. For, they built not to glorify God but to glorify themselves, and thus the Lord brought confusion to their language and the project was abandoned.

From the start, under the guidance of Father Victor, this project was undertaken to glorify God, and to do so, by welcoming the many new residents who have moved into the area. The language spoken here is the Word of God, the universal language of faith and love; and the purpose of this building is to be a place of worship and a place to deepen the fellowship that is ours in Christ Jesus. We might say of this

building that it is our version of the cenacle, the “upper room”, where the Apostles took part in the first Eucharist, met the Risen Lord, received the power to forgive sins, and experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we invoke the Spirit of God, not with fear, but hope and confidence!

We have further reason to hope. We invoke the blessing of the Holy Spirit, not as those estranged from God, but rather as those who are his beloved sons and daughters, reborn in Baptism and anointed by the Holy Spirit. Even as we experience life’s hardships, anxieties, limitations, and temptations –or to use St. Paul’s term –even as we “groan” while awaiting the fullness of redemption –we live in hope and we ask the Holy Spirit to intercede for us as only He can.

With that hope of life eternal in our hearts, we bless[ed] the baptismal font where your children, grandchildren, friends, and neighbors will be re-born by water and the Holy Spirit. As they are baptized in water, the living water of Baptism, that is to say, the Holy Spirit, will flow through them as it does through us. In that same hope, we bless the ambry, the repository of the Holy Oils by which the strength of the Holy Spirit is communicated to us in the Sacraments.

Re-birth in the font of Baptism, anointing with Spirit in Confirmation, the ongoing forgiveness of our sins through the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Reconciliation –all of this is the gateway to the heart of our faith, namely, the Eucharist. And so, with the same hope and confidence, we will invoke the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon the altar where the One Sacrifice of Christ will be renewed for us and our salvation. God’s Son became one of us and died on the Cross to restore our relationship to the Father, undermined by sin. And, as Pope Francis teaches, “From the immense gift of love which is Jesus’ death on the Cross, the Holy Spirit has been poured out on humanity like a vast torrent of grace.” We gather each Sunday for the Eucharist to repair and deepen our status as the Father’s adopted sons and daughters. By taking part in the Eucharistic liturgy and receiving the Lord’s Body and Blood, we put ourselves in the path of that vast torrent of grace of the Holy Spirit. When the priest calls down the Spirit upon the bread and wine and pronounces, in the very person of Christ, the words of consecration, they become the Body and Blood of the Father’s own beloved Son. Receiving Jesus, we cry out in the Holy Spirit, “Jesus is Lord!” Receiving Jesus, we cry out in the Holy Spirit, “Abba!

Father!" And thus do we recognize one another not merely as fellow parishioners but rather as brothers and sisters in Christ, sons and daughters of the One Father. So it is that we bless this new altar with hope and joy!

At the end of this Holy Mass, we will bless the new tabernacle where the Eucharistic species – consecrated hosts – the true, living, and personal Presence of Jesus – is reverently reposed. Thus does the Lord remain with us and in the Holy Spirit invites us to grow in intimacy with himself. Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament reserved, spending time with Jesus, opens our hearts more widely to the truth of the Gospel and the transformation of our lives we are called to undergo. Let me also say that prayer before the Blessed Sacrament also drives the mission of this and any parish as it seeks to evangelize – For as we pray before the Blessed Sacrament we are overshadowed by the Spirit who sends us forth to bear witness to Christ in our daily lives, by word and example.

Let us then ask the Holy Spirit, not only to bless this building and its furnishings set aside for sacred purposes, but also to bless us and to keep us always in his love!