

# **Pentecost Sunday Homily 2016**

## **I. Introduction**

A. If you or I were to walk into Saint Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, our eye would be drawn to the enormous stained glass window at the far end of the basilica. It is the window of the Holy Spirit. In it, the Holy Spirit is pictured in the form of a dove, and the light streaming through that window floods the interior of St. Peter's with a peaceful, golden light. From the window emanate rays of gold in the form of a sunburst, illustrating that the light of the Holy Spirit and His gifts are powerful and abundant, ... and, they fill the whole Church.

B. Let's keep this image in mind as we reflect on what the Feast of Pentecost means. It has been 50 days since Easter, and today, the Lord Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, with God the Father, pours out the Holy Spirit upon the Church, flooding it with peaceful light and with the power and strength needed to continue the mission of bringing the Gospel to every nation and every person.

## **II. You shall receive power**

A. In our first reading we find the Apostles gathered together in the Upper Room, where Jesus had celebrated the Last Supper with them on the night before he died. There, "with one accord, they devoted themselves to prayer" as Scripture says. As they prayed, they remembered what Jesus recently said to them: "Before many days," he said, "you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit... you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."

B. Today we give thanks because the Holy Spirit indeed has indeed come upon us. In Confirmation, the Bishop asked us: "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who came upon the Apostles at Pentecost, and today is given to you sacramentally in Confirmation?" The Holy Spirit comes upon us first in Baptism, and then more fully and perfectly in Confirmation.

C. In the Gospel, we heard of another coming of the Holy Spirit. It was the evening

of the first Easter Sunday, when the Risen Christ came to be with the Apostles. He breathed on them, and gave them the Holy Spirit, so that they and their successors, would have from Christ the power to forgive sins.

### **III. The Fruits of the Holy Spirit**

A. This shows us something very important: that there exists – both in the Church and in our individual lives – an inseparable link between the forgiveness of sins and the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who makes possible the forgiveness of sins through the ministry of priests. Indeed, this is what we hear when we receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation: “God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins.”

B. And so, it’s the forgiveness of our sins that enables us to receive the Holy Spirit in ever greater measure. And the Holy Spirit is the most gracious of guests. He will only come where he is invited. If the door of our soul is closed to the Holy Spirit through sin, the Holy Spirit simply cannot come and work within us. If the door is cracked open, even a little, the Spirit of God will seek to enter.

C. And how do we know whether the Holy Spirit is working within us? First and foremost, as St. Paul tells us today, we will claim Jesus as Lord! In the Spirit, we know and love Jesus not as a mere figure of history but as the Someone who is most real and present and active in our lives. Further, we can know if the Holy Spirit is at work in us when we see evidence of spiritual gifts in our lives . . . a gift for sharing the faith with others, a gift for reaching out to those in need, a gift for organizing, for getting people to volunteer . . . the list goes on. So also, in his Letter to the Galatians, St. Paul lists the Fruits of the Holy Spirit – those traits which are the unmistakable evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in us. They are: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Who wouldn’t want spiritual gifts for themselves and for others? Who wouldn’t want the fruits of the Holy Spirit for themselves and those they love?

D. The fact is, our human talents, and efforts, and good will can only bring us so far toward acquiring these traits which we find so attractive and know to be so good. It

is the Holy Spirit who alone can ultimately give them to us. But in order to receive them, our minds and hearts must be open to receiving them. So when we speak of the connection between the forgiveness of sins and the working of the Holy Spirit, we recall that a frequent and regular reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is absolutely essential to our life in Christ – so that the Holy Spirit can be fully at work within us, strengthening our friendship with Christ, granting us spiritual gifts to be shared with others, filling us with those fruits which are a foretaste of and preparation for Heaven. As Saint Teresa of Ávila once put it, “The road to Heaven is heavenly.”

E. So on this Pentecost Sunday, coming as it does within the Year of Mercy, let us resolve to make a good, thorough, unburdening confession soon – whether it’s been a matter of weeks, or months, or years, since our last confession. “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,” Jesus said to the Apostles in today’s Gospel, “and whose sins you retain are retained.” And in this way, we will be fully open to the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Indeed, this is something we can fully appreciate only when we experience it, because, as Saint Cyril of Jerusalem explains, “As light strikes the eyes of someone who comes out of darkness into the sunshine and enables them to see clearly things they could not discern before, so light floods the soul of the one counted worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit, and enables them to see things beyond the range of human vision, things hitherto undreamed of” (St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Living Water of the Holy Spirit).

## **IV. Conclusion**

A. Let me leave you with a final thought. In today’s Gospel, we notice that “[t]he disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.” This was the joy of Easter – the Apostles’ joy of encountering Christ, their joy of being reunited with Christ, the joy of once again being with their Friend. They were seeing Christ not after a separation of time and distance, but after the seemingly definitive separation of death. But now He is risen, and he is with them in a new and powerful way; he loves them and pours forth the Holy Spirit upon them. And the point of today’s feast is that he loves us too, and he is with us, and he pours out upon us the Holy Spirit.

B. And as Benedict XVI said, beneath the window of the Holy Spirit in St. Peter’s

Basilica: "Yes, it is beautiful to live because I am loved and it is the Truth who loves me. 'The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.' On this Pentecost Sunday these words are addressed also to us, because in faith we can see him. In faith he comes among us and to us too he shows his hands and his side, and we rejoice. Therefore let us pray, 'Lord, show yourself! Give us the gift of your presence, and we shall have the most beautiful gift, the gift of your joy. Amen!'" (Pentecost Sunday Homily 2011).