

At the first Pentecost after the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit was manifested, given and communicated as a divine Person to the Church, fulfilling the paschal mystery of Christ according to his promise (CCC p.893).

The Holy Spirit is, as it were, the soul of the Church, animating her and giving her life. In the words of Pope Leo XIII, “If Christ is the Head of the Church, the Holy Spirit is her soul” (DS 3328). All that the Church is and all that she does, in her preaching, in her teaching, in her Holy Mysteries, is by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Pope Pius XII said that the Holy Spirit is “the principle of every vital and truly salvific action” (DS 3808). This is why every Holy Mystery calls on the descent of the Holy Spirit. At the Holy Eucharist, for instance, the Holy Spirit is called down upon the gifts, to make them the body and blood of the Lord.

The Holy Spirit is poured out on the Church at Pentecost, but He is also given to each one of us through

the Holy Mystery of Chrismation. Chrismation is our own, personal Pentecost. But it is like a seed that is planted in the earth. If we do not care for this seed, it will remain dormant, asleep. Living by the Holy Spirit is not forced on us. We must seek Him, call on Him, and open hearts to His divine inspiration and power. We must respond to the grace of the Holy Spirit.

While the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a gift to the Church, it was also a miraculous conversion for each of the Apostles. The conversion of the Apostles, however, did not begin on the day of Pentecost. It only culminated there. The Apostles experienced two other prior conversions. The early Fathers, Doctors of the Church, and many saints, recognized this. The divisions of the three conversions of the Apostles are traditionally referred to as the purgative, illuminative and unitive ways or the way of beginners, the way of the proficient and the

way of the perfect. What happened to the Apostles in their conversion should happen to us. This doesn't mean that we are to *do* all the same things that the Apostles did or experience all of the same things. It means that we are to be converted, transformed in mind and heart as they were. In this respect, we are no different than the Apostles.

The first stage of the Apostle's conversion was to follow Jesus. This continued up until before the Passion of our Lord. The second stage of conversion was that period from the Passion through the Ascension. And the third stage of their conversion began with the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost.

The first stage, or the first conversion of the Apostles was to leave everything and follow Jesus. Peter, James and John had been out fishing all night, caught nothing, and had returned to shore to clean and mend

their nets. Jesus was there teaching a crowd of people. Our Lord got into Peter's boat, and said to them, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch (Luke 5:4). Remember, they had been at it all night long and caught nothing. Here is Luke's account of the great catch of fish.

They enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him (Lk 5:1–11).

Peter acknowledges that he is a sinner, and gives up everything to follow Jesus. James and John do the same. This first conversion, however, is not simply about giving up our possessions. Few are called to do that. It is about

our attachments to things, and it concerns the heart.

Jesus says,

Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matt 6:21).

When Jesus called the rich young man to give up his possession and follow Him, the Scripture says, “He [the young man] went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions (Matt. 19:22). The rich man was sad, and could not follow Jesus, because he was attached to his possessions, and so to all the comforts and prestige that his wealth afforded him. His possessions possessed his heart. This is, however, not only about attachment to possessions. It is also about the attachment to the pleasures of life, to comfort seeking, desiring the excessive attention of others, self-importance, love of prestige, position, or power. There are many things to which our heart can be attached in this way.

When we decide to follow Jesus, these attachments must be purged from our soul. Anything that turns our love, our affections our desires away from Jesus, keeps us from following Him. It is not that we must fling away everything we possess. And it is not about never enjoying anything. It is, instead, about a kind of affection for these things such that we cling to them, even if only slightly. It is the disorder love of these things and of ourselves. Such attachments keep us from God, take away our freedom, and lead us to sin. Do we not often fail to do the right thing, and fail to pursue what is good, because we refuse to deny ourselves? We put our wants and desires above what is good and true, what we know we ought to do. We neglect daily prayer and things such as spiritual reading, and acts of charity because it does not please us in the way that we wish.

The first conversion, then, is a purgation, a purification from these sorts of attachments, from the love of possession and comforts, but also from pride and self-seeking motives as we see in the lives of the apostles.

Remember how they all ran away when Jesus was arrested and crucified? Jesus told them that they would do this, but they all insisted that they would never abandon Him, that they would die with Him. Think of everything that they had witnessed over the three years they had lived with the Lord. Up to this point, they had believed all that Jesus said to them, even if they did not fully understand Him. Such was the case when our Lord told the crowd that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. Hearing this, everyone left Jesus except the Apostles. Although the Apostles did not understand this teaching, they remained with the Lord. Jesus asked them, “Will you also leave?” They responded, “To whom

shall we go? *You have the words of eternal life*”. But yet, they reject the Lord’s foretelling that they would fall away? It was not so much that Jesus knew the future, as it was that He knew the Apostles. They were sinners, weak and seriously lacking virtue, especially, humility. It was out of pride that they could not accept the truth that Jesus was telling them about themselves. Peter was particularly prideful, comparing himself to the other Apostles, saying,

“Even though they all fall away, I will not.” And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” But he said vehemently [meaning, more than extreme], “If I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And they all said the same (Mark 14:29–31).

And see, also, how James and John sought positions of power.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him, and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you? And they said to

him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (Mark 10:35–38).

Jesus tells them that they don’t know what they are asking. And so, He says to them,

“Are you able to drink the chalice that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And they said to him, “We are able”. (Mark 10:39).

As it turned out, that they were not, in fact, able to do this, at least, not until after they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

These are all examples of the first stage of conversion. The Apostles were in this phase for the three years that they had followed the Lord. But they were to pass from this into the next stage. This took place from the Passion of our Lord until His ascension. While all of the Apostles passed through this conversion, we need only to consider Peter.

Peter denied Jesus three times. Scripture says that he vehemently (more than extremely) denied that he knew Jesus, swearing as he did so. Scripture says:

While he [Peter] was still speaking, the cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly. The men who were holding Jesus mocked him and beat him; they also blindfolded him and asked him, “Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?”⁶⁵ And they spoke many other words against him, reviling him (Luke 22:60–65).

In an extremely painful way, Peter is faced with the truth about himself. With a single glance from Jesus, He is purified of his presumption and self-reliance. He deeply feels his weakness and cowardice. His repentance and sorrow were profound, such that he became a new man. Here, Peter experiences a second conversion.

Remember that the others also ran away, abandoning the Lord. They too insisted that they would die with Him.

And remember how they sought positions of power. In this second period of conversion, however, they were purged of their egotism, presumption and self-seeking. Through His passion, death and resurrection, they were illuminated with the truth about themselves and the truth about the Lord. Scripture says that Jesus appeared to them and showed them in many convincing ways that He was alive, and that He taught them over the course of forty days before ascending into heaven (Acts 1: 3-4). They were greatly enlightened, and in many ways, painfully cured of many of their faults. But think of the pain they must still have felt after His ascension. Seeing Jesus alive and being with him for forty days, He left them, ascending into heaven. They no longer had the Lord with them, to see Him, touch Him and listen to His voice. This too was a purification for them. Although they had been converted a second time, being humbled and

enlightened, they remained powerless to carry out the mission that the Lord had given them, to go unto all nations. At our Lord's ascension into heaven, however, He said to them:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

And then, He left them. In this promise, they rejoiced.

Deprived of the Lord's presence, however, they humbly waited and prayed, helpless to do anything else. Then there came the third conversion of the Apostles at Pentecost.

The Apostles, from the start of their conversion in following Jesus, went from being unable to understand our Lord's teaching, from being self-seeking, prideful, cowards, to being enlighten and boldly preaching the Gospel after Pentecost. Many were amazed at their

wisdom. They became selfless, no longer following the Lord out of self-interest and importance. Now they would love and serve God for His own sake and not their own advantage. They were no longer fearful, and so courageously faced persecution and death. These simple rustics, weak and sinful men, went out to convert the world, and they succeeded.

The three conversion that we see in the lives of the Apostles are for us. It is in the normal course of following Jesus. We should beg the Lord for the grace to be converted in this way, and do whatever we are able to do to advance as the Apostles did. We have to give up our clinging to the things of this life and our prideful ways. We may have to fail and experience the painful sorrow of Peter. We may have to shed many tears. All of this, however, is to prepare us for a profound transformation through the Holy Spirit's inspiration and power active in

our souls. There is no greater happiness than this, this side of heaven.

Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, everywhere present and filling all things. Treasury of blessings and give of life, come, dwell within us and save our souls O gracious One (Troparion of Pentecost)