

Homily Notes for Pentecost June 5 2022 Cycle C

Readings: Acts 2:1-11, 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13, Sequence, John 20:19-23

1. The Sequence for this Sunday, one of the few obligatory ones for the liturgical year, begins with *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* – Come Holy Spirit come! The assembly begs, implores, cajoles the Spirit to come to “melt the frozen, warm the chill”. Paul himself knows that the Spirit’s gift at baptism gifts the faithful with a fearless utterance addressed directly to God: “for those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a Spirit of adoption, through whom we cry, “Abba, Father!” That cry to God has an exclamation point!, forcing us to ask ourselves how badly we want to be born into God’s newness in the spirit.

2. So, Jesus bestows on those who long to be set free and who really want it, the spirit of peace, which will take his disciples out of a closed room and into mission. That evangelization will be rooted in reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins, the origin of the Spirit’s resting like a tranquil dove on the church.

3. The apostles have returned to Jerusalem after Jesus’ ascension and are gathered in the Upper Room where Jesus had celebrated the Last Supper. It was the first novena, and it was Jesus himself who requested it when he asked the apostles to remain there in prayer until the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). This was the very same room where Jesus appeared to the apostles on Easter Sunday evening. John tells us in his Gospel that they had the doors locked on Easter Sunday because they were afraid (John 20:19). They locked themselves into the Upper Room during Jesus’ passion because they were terrified. They may have been thinking that what happened to Jesus might happen to them next. Now waiting in prayer in the Upper Room after Jesus’ ascension, the apostles were joined in prayer by Mary the mother of Jesus, and others (Acts 1:14). What happened at Pentecost? Well, after receiving the Holy Spirit, the apostles left the Upper Room and began preaching. When we continue reading Acts after today’s first reading, we see Peter preaching about Jesus at Pentecost after receiving the Holy Spirit. As a result of Peter’s preaching, we read in Acts that three thousand asked to be baptized (Acts 2:42).

4. It can easily be shown from examples both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, that the spirit changes those in whom he comes to dwell; he so transforms them that they began to live a completely new kind of life. Saul was told by the prophet Samuel: *The spirit of the Lord will take possession of you, and you shall be changed into another man.* St. Paul writes: *As we behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, that glory which comes from the Lord, who is the spirit, transforms us all into his own likeness, from one degree of glory to another.*

5. Does this not show that the spirit changes those in whom he comes to dwell and alters the whole pattern of their lives? With the spirit within them it is quite natural for people who had been absorbed by the things of this world to become entirely otherworldly in outlook, and for cowards to become men of great courage. There can be no doubt that this is what happened to the disciples. The strength they received from the Spirit enabled them to hold firmly to the love of Christ facing the violence of their persecutors unafraid.

6. Look at the transformation in Peter as a result of receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. When Jesus was being questioned before the Sanhedrin, Peter denied Jesus, and out of all the apostles only John went to the cross. But now, as a result of receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter is transformed. He is not afraid anymore. He is fearless. Later in Acts we see Peter preaching again, and as a result he was brought before the Sanhedrin and warned not to preach about Jesus (Acts 4).

7. When the Sanhedrin released him, what did he do? He went right back to preaching. When you see Peter in the Gospels, you would never imagine this happening. But after receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter is almost unrecognizable. We see this very clearly in one incident later in Acts; the apostles were working many miracles just like Jesus, and people used to bring their sick out onto the streets as they passed by, hoping that at least Peter's shadow might fall on the sick as he went past (Acts 5:14-15). Nowhere in the Gospels do we read that people hoped Jesus' shadow would fall on them. Peter grew and grew spiritually after receiving the Holy Spirit. He was not afraid of persecution for the sake of Jesus anymore. When Jesus was being questioned by the Sanhedrin, Peter denied three times that he knew Jesus because he was afraid of persecution, but after Pentecost, he was no longer afraid of persecution.

8. When we see this enormous change in Peter, we can ask ourselves, "Are we like Peter in the Gospels, afraid to be seen as someone associated with Jesus, or like Peter in Acts, not afraid to be persecuted when known to be a follower of Jesus?" Again, and again elsewhere, I have heard this motto, "Proud to be Catholic." On this Pentecost day, we can ask ourselves, "Are we proud to be Catholic?" Which Peter are we like? Peter in the Gospels or Peter in Acts after receiving the Holy Spirit? Obviously, our ideal is to be like Peter in Acts after receiving the Holy Spirit, no longer afraid of being associated with Jesus but proud to be seen with Jesus, proud to be Catholic. If we are not yet proud to be seen with Jesus, proud to be Catholic, we need to pray for more of the Holy Spirit in our lives, to pray for more of what Peter received at Pentecost. Fortitude is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Certainly, in this culture we need fortitude to be Catholic.

9. In Year B, a reading from Paul's letter to the Galatians (Gal 5:16-25; Year B), we hear two lists. The first one listed what some translations call "works of the flesh" and other translations call "self-indulgence." In the second list, Paul gives the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23). Traditionally the Church has also added another three fruits of the Spirit – goodness, modesty and chastity – giving us a total of twelve fruits of the Spirit; (Catechism of the Catholic Church § 1832). It is a beautiful list. What a wonderful place this world would be if everyone lived that list. We would have heaven on earth: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Just as we can ask ourselves are we like Peter in the Gospels or like Peter in Acts, we can ask ourselves how much more we need these fruits of the Spirit in our lives. We all need to pray for more of the Holy Spirit in our lives, so that we will have more of these fruits of the Holy Spirit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

10. I conclude with the Opening Prayer or Collect of Mass today:

*O God, who by the mystery of today's great feast
sanctify your whole Church in every people and nation,
pour out, we pray, the gifts of the Holy Spirit
across the face of the earth
and, with the divine grace that was at work
when the Gospel was first proclaimed,
fill now once more the hearts of believers.*

Amen