

PENTECOST SUNDAY, B
THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT OF LOVE

“When the Advocate comes, Whom I will send to you from the father, the Spirit of Truth Who comes from the Father, He will testify on My behalf.”

The Pentecost Sunday marks very historic and salvific moments in the life of the Church and the life of every Christian. Historically, the Pentecost was a great Jewish event when the Jews celebrated the birth of their nation as a *Chosen People of God* following the Covenant Law given to Moses at Sinai (Leviticus 23: 15-21; Deuteronomy 16: 9-11). All devout Jews (and friends of the people and nation of Israel) from everywhere were expected to return to Jerusalem for this great occasion. It was a celebration of great remembrance with a deep sense of gratitude and pride as a nation. This explains why the people from almost every part of the world gathered on the First Pentecost as narrated in the First Reading (Acts 2: 1-11). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Mary and the Apostles could not have taken place on a better day for the obvious reason that the Pentecost marked a new beginning of a universal kingdom that would spread to “the ends of the earth” (Acts 1: 8). The sending of the Holy Spirit was a divine act in fulfillment of the promise of Jesus to His Apostles: *I will ask the Father and He will give you another to be your Advocate, Who will be with you forever* (John 14: 16). The narrative of Luke in Acts of the Apostles presents a very vivid descriptive picture of the epochal occurrence, which was unprecedented, sublime and filled with mystery. The Apostles, in obedience to Jesus at the Ascension, had returned to the Upper Room to *wait for the fulfillment of the Father’s promise* (Acts 1: 4). As they waited St. Luke reports in the First reading that:

... suddenly from heaven came a sound like a strong rushing wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. There appeared tongues as of fire which parted and came to rest upon each one of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim” (Acts 2: 2-4).

This mystery of the descent of the Holy Spirit was the most powerful experience of the promised Paraclete in human history. This experience instantly gifted the Apostles the utterance to speak in different languages. They became so emboldened that the hitherto timid and fearful Apostles bravely went out to address the crowd, courageously witnessing to the reality of the Risen Christ. St. Cyril of Alexandria explains this thus: “The strength they received from the Spirit enabled them to hold firmly to the love of Christ, facing the violence of their persecutors unafraid.” This marked the birth of the universal Church, Body of Christ, which is commissioned to give a new life to a new humanity. Just as God created the first man out of dust and filled him with His Spirit (Genesis 2: 7), so at Pentecost, the new Adam gives a life-giving Spirit to a new humanity, redeemed by His Blood (1 Corinthians 15: 45).

The Holy Spirit, with all His gifts, is poured out on us, who are members of this Body of Christ. These gifts: Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Counsel, Fortitude, Piety and Fear of God; and their accompanying fruits: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity; are given to us for service “to build up the Church” (1 Corinthians 14: 12). St. Paul, in his treatise on the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12 – 14) teaches that *there is a diversity of gifts, but the Spirit is the same ... There is a diversity of ministries ... There is a diversity of work, but the same God works in all* (1 Corinthians 12: 4-6). Just as there is diversity in the gifts, ministries and works of the Spirit, so are they distributed to us differently *just as the Spirit chooses* (1 Corinthians 12: 11). To each of us, who were baptised by the one Spirit into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12: 13), therefore, were given different gifts of the Holy Spirit according to our ability. These are God’s gracious gifts intended for service in the faith community. That they are gifts should make us humble and realise that it is not by any form of reward for any goodness or holiness of our lives that we possess them. The diversity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit necessitates complementarities and solidarity among the members of the Body of Christ. The Church needs our gifts as much as She deserves the gifts of others. The Holy Spirit so made it that no one would claim possession of the fullness of His gifts, except Jesus, and no one could claim to be self-sufficient without the gifts of others. The Church, therefore, is a garden where all the flowers (of the Holy Spirit) must be given equal nourishment to grow and flourish if she must attain her full potential and achieve the mission for which she was founded. As Paul has taught, love is the greatest of all (1 Corinthians 13: 13). No doubts, love is the foundation, the reason, and the motive of all the gifts of God, Who Himself is love (1 John 4: 8). Love gives life to the gifts of the Holy Spirit and makes the fruits available and accessible in the community of believers. Where there is love, there is acceptance, tolerance, openness, forgiveness, growth, freedom, unity, and teamwork. Love opens our hearts to be generous with our gifts for the good of others; love makes us recognise and appreciate the gifts of others without jealousy and envy; love creates room for everyone to feel welcomed. The Christian community filled with the Holy Spirit must be a family of love. This is the challenge that this day poses to us. Therefore, we pray as inspired by the Apostle Paul that *God’s love may be poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us* (Romans 5: 5).

My dear friends, the Holy Spirit is given to us all; the Spirit of God is available, always available to us, but each of us receives the Spirit based on the proportion of our preparedness and ability. St. Hilary of Poitiers puts it better in these words: “This unique gift which is in Christ is offered in its fullness to everyone. It is everywhere available, but it is given to each man in proportion to his readiness to receive it. Its presence is the fuller, the greater a man’s desire to be worthy of it.” Lord, we pray, that we may be ready and willing to receive the gifts of Your Spirit and bear its fruits in our lives, the Church, and the whole world.

