

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST
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My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we conclude the Easter Season, as the Apostolic Nuncio, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis, assuring you of his spiritual closeness and paternal affection. I greet all those joining by television, radio and live streaming. Today, we celebrate that great outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, gathered in prayer with Mary, the Mother of the Lord.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit appears as a Divine Power who helps bring the mission to fulfillment, transforming the Apostles from being cowardly to being bold. In the Gospel of John, the disciples are locked behind closed doors in fear, but having received the Holy Spirit from Jesus directly, they went out into the whole world to preach the Good News.

In Acts, we hear, that after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles are imbued with a boldness. Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, preaches on the day of Pentecost and converts thousands by the power of the Spirit.

Acts recounts that at Pentecost, the Spirit of God rushed upon them and *there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.* All who heard them, heard them in their own language and yet all came to knowledge of the mighty acts of God.

The Spirit was working through the Church, through the Apostles, to restore unity to the human family. The Spirit compelled the Apostles to come out of themselves and their comfort zone to go out to the crowds which were a sign and symbol of then then-known nations and peoples, who were divided among themselves, following the calamity of the Tower of Babel, which was heard in churches yesterday at the Vigil of Pentecost.

Pope Francis said:

“Before, they had almost never spoken in public, and when they did, they had often blundered, as when Peter denied Jesus; now they speak with parrhesia to everyone. The disciples’ journey seemed to have reached the end of the line, when suddenly they were rejuvenated by the Spirit. Overwhelmed with uncertainty, when they thought everything was over, they were transformed by a joy that gave them a new birth. The Holy Spirit did this. The Spirit is far from being an abstract reality: he is the Person who is most concrete and close, the one who changes our lives.” (POPE FRANCIS, HOMILY, PENTECOST, 9 JUNE 2019)

This remains the mission of the Church: to bring unity in a polarized world. The fragmentation of the world began with our first parents but worsened after the building of the tower of Babel, when men wanted to make a name for themselves, desiring equality with God. Their project born out of a desire for

power and fame, tinged with arrogance. They relied too much on their own efforts and failed to give God the glory that is His due.

It is not unlike our times. This country, which historically has been known as a “melting pot”, is increasingly becoming divided along political lines or along ethnic lines. People want to know our status: Republican or Democrat; vaccinated or unvaccinated; citizen or migrant. How many are interested in knowing whether the other person is our brother or sister or fellow-Christian?

There is a tremendous alienation in society which has its roots in Babel. In contrast to Babel, we have the Lukan Pentecost event, recalled in Acts, which brings people together in unity according to the Spirit. The difference between Babel and Pentecost lies in the center. That is, around what is our unity built? Around God or around man?

His Holiness says:

“Let us now focus on ourselves, the Church of today. We can ask ourselves: “What is it that unites us, what is the basis of our unity?”. We too have our differences, for example: of opinions, choices, sensibilities. But the temptation is always fiercely to defend our ideas, believing them to be good for everybody and agreeing only with those who think as we do. This is a bad temptation that brings division. But this is a faith created in our own image; it is not what the Spirit wants. We might think that what unite us are our beliefs and our morality. But there is much more: our principle of unity is the Holy Spirit.”
(POPE FRANCIS, PENTECOST HOMILY, 31 MAY 2020)

In the unity of Pentecost, God is at the center. Each person is not for himself or herself; rather, everyone aims to approach God. Like the spokes of a wheel that proceed toward the hub until they reach unity at single point, so are the members of the Church at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit, the bond of love between the Father and Son, has been poured into our hearts, drawing us away from self-love, narcissism, and from being self-referential and directing us toward God and our destiny.

Pope Francis refers to the Spirit as a “specialist in changing chaos into cosmos, in creating harmony,” and he does so in both the Church and the world, bringing unity in our diversity, especially in the diversity of our gifts and talents, which can be put in service of the Church and all of humanity.

Before Pentecost, the Apostles argued with each other over who would be the greatest among them. They wanted to sit at Jesus’ right and left. They were indignant or angry with one another. Two years ago, at Pentecost, Pope Francis identified four causes of this anger: narcissism; victimhood; pessimism; and a famine of hope. Why should I give myself to others? Why isn’t anyone concerned about me? What good is giving? It is useless! Even if I try, everything else around me seems bleak, so why should I bother?

But these questions focus on ourselves. We risk becoming a self-referential Church. “It is all about me.” Our self-absorption leads us to resent others. In contrast, after Pentecost, in openness to the Spirit, the focus of the Apostles is directed toward God and the mission entrusted to them. They had learned the language of humility, which enabled them to be unified in carrying out their mission, which reveals to us that first task of the Church is proclamation.

They went forth in the power of the Spirit, not to proclaim themselves, but the power of the Risen Lord! The Word of God could not be chained. They would be witnesses, not to their own glory, but to the mighty works of God. Last year at Pentecost, Pope Francis shared this advice:

“Put God before yourself”. This is the decisive step in the spiritual life, which is not the sum of our own merits and achievements, but a humble openness to God. The Spirit affirms the primacy of grace. Only by emptying ourselves, do we leave room for the Lord; only by giving ourselves to him, do we find ourselves; only by becoming poor in spirit, do we become rich in the Holy Spirit.” (POPE FRANCIS, PENTECOST, HOMILY, 23 MAY 2021)

Pentecost was a privileged time, but the Church today needs a new Pentecost, a new outpouring of the Spirit. The Pope reminds us that the Holy Spirit affirms the primacy of today and the grace of the present moment. The Church must call upon the Spirit to renew her, not for maintaining structures, but for her mission of bringing salvation to the world.

God now gives us this time – this moment – to be the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. He calls us to mediate the Presence of Christ in the human reality through a renewal in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This Pentecost Day, Christ stands before us and says once more, “*Receive the Holy Spirit.*” Let us ask this same Spirit to transform us into paracletes, comforters and advocates, missionaries of mercy, and beacons of light and life. Come, Holy Spirit. *Veni Sancte Spiritus! Amen.*