

SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 31 May 1998

1. *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem*: I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life.

With the words of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Church proclaims her faith in the Paraclete; a faith that is born of the *apostolic experience of Pentecost*. The passage from the Acts of the Apostles, which today's liturgy has offered for our meditation, recalls in fact the marvels worked on the day of Pentecost, when with great astonishment the Apostles saw Jesus' words come true. As was mentioned in the passage from St John's Gospel proclaimed a few moments ago, on the eve of his Passion he had assured them: "I will pray the Father and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever" (*Jn 14:16*). This "Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (*Jn 14:26*).

And the Holy Spirit, coming down upon them with extraordinary power, enabled them to proclaim the teaching of Christ Jesus to the whole world. Their courage was so great, their determination so sure, that they were prepared to do anything, even to give up their life. The gift of the Spirit *had released their deepest energies, concentrating them on the mission entrusted to them by the Redeemer*. And it will be the Counsellor, the *Parakletos*, who will guide them in preaching the Gospel to all. The Spirit will teach them the whole truth, drawing it from the wealth of Christ's word, so that, in turn, they may communicate it to people in Jerusalem and the rest of the world.

2. How can we not give thanks to God for the wonders the Spirit has never ceased to accomplish in these two millennia of Christian life? Indeed, the event of grace at Pentecost has continued to bear its marvellous fruits, everywhere instilling apostolic zeal, a desire for contemplation, the commitment to live and serve God and our brothers and sisters with complete dedication. Today too, the Spirit sustains great and small acts of forgiveness and prophecy in the Church and gives life to ever new charisms and gifts, which attest to his ceaseless action in human hearts.

An eloquent proof of this is today's solemn liturgy attended by a vast number of those belonging to movements and new communities, who in these days have held their World Congress in Rome. Yesterday, in this same St Peter's Square, we enjoyed an unforgettable, festive gathering with songs, prayers and testimonies. We experienced the atmosphere of Pentecost which made

visible in a way the Spirit's inexhaustible fruitfulness in the Church. The movements and new communities, providential expressions of the new springtime brought forth by the Spirit with the Second Vatican Council, announce the power of God's love which in overcoming divisions and barriers of every kind, renews the face of the earth to build the civilization of love.

3. St Paul writes in the Letter to the Romans, proclaimed a few moments ago: "*All who are led by the Spirit of God are Sons of God*" (Rm 8:14).

These words suggest a further way of understanding the wonderful action of the Spirit in our life as believers. *They open the way for us to reach the human heart*: the Holy Spirit, whom the Church calls upon to give "*light to the senses*", visits man inwardly and directly touches the depths of his being.

The Apostle continues: "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you.... For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (cf. *Rom* 8:9, 14). Contemplating then the mysterious action of the Paraclete, he adds with deep feeling: "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery ... but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry 'Abba, Father!', it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (*Rm* 8:15-16). Here we are at the *centre of the mystery*! It is in the meeting between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit that we find the very heart of what the Apostles experienced at Pentecost. This extraordinary experience is present in the Church born of that event and accompanies her down the centuries.

Under the Holy Spirit's action, man fully discovers that his spiritual nature is not veiled by corporeity but, on the contrary, it is his spirit which gives true meaning to his body. Indeed, by living according to the Spirit, he fully manifests the gift of his adoption as a son of God.

It is in this context that we find the fundamental question *of the relationship between life and death*, which Paul touches on when he says: "If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (*Rom*8:13). It is exactly so: docility to the Spirit gives man continuous opportunities for life.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, it is a great joy for me to greet all of you who have wished to join me in thanking the Lord for the gift of the Spirit. This totally missionary celebration extends our gaze to the whole world, with a particular thought for the many missionary priests, religious and laypeople who spend their lives spreading the truth of the Gospel, often in the most difficult conditions.

I greet those of you here present: the Cardinals, my Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood, the numerous members of the various institutes of consecrated life and apostolic life, the young people, the sick and especially all who have come from so far away for this solemn occasion.

I would especially like to mention the movements and the new communities, which had their meeting yesterday and which I see present today in large numbers. Not so large as yesterday, but still large. I extend a special greeting to the How can we not give thanks to God for the wonders the Spirit has never ceased to accomplish? Pentecost has continued to bear its marvellous fruits, instilling apostolic zeal, a desire for contemplation, the commitment to live and serve God and our brothers and sisters with complete dedication. young people who are about to receive the sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist.

What exciting prospects the Apostle's words offer to each of you, dear friends! Through the actions and words of the sacrament of Confirmation, you will be given the Holy Spirit, who will complete your conformity to Christ, already begun in Baptism, to make you adults in the faith and authentic and courageous witnesses to the Risen One. With Confirmation, the Paraclete opens before you a path of continual rediscovery of the grace of adoption as children of God, which will make you joyful seekers of the Truth.

The Eucharist, the food of immortal life, which in a few moments you will taste for the first time, will make you ready to love and serve your brothers and sisters, capable of offering opportunities for life and hope, free from the domination of the "flesh" and of fear. By letting yourselves be guided by Jesus, you will be able to experience concretely the marvellous action of his Spirit, which the Apostle Paul speaks of in the eighth chapter of his Letter to the Romans. This text, whose message is particularly timely in this year dedicated to the Holy Spirit, will be read today with greater attention, as a tribute to what Christ's Spirit accomplishes in each of us.

5. *Veni, Sancte Spiritus!*

The magnificent sequence, which contains a rich theology of the Holy Spirit, would also be worthy of meditation, stanza by stanza. Here we will reflect only on the first word: *Veni*, come! It recalls the *waiting* of the Apostles after Christ's Ascension into heaven.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke presents them to us gathered in the Upper Room in prayer with the Mother of Jesus (cf. *Acts* 1:14). What better words than these could express their prayer: "*Veni, Sancte Spiritus*" — the invocation, that is, of the one who moved over the face of the waters at the beginning of the world (cf. *Gn* 1:2), whom Jesus had promised them as the Paraclete?

The hearts of Mary and the Apostles at those moments were longing for his coming, alternating between ardent faith and the confession of human inadequacy. The Church's piety has interpreted and passed on this sentiment in the hymn "*Veni, Sancte Spiritus*". The Apostles know that the work Christ has entrusted to them is arduous, but decisive for the history of humanity's salvation. Will they be able to complete it? The Lord reassures their hearts. At every step of the mission that will lead them to proclaim and witness to the Gospel to the furthest corners of the globe, *they will be able to count on the Spirit promised by Christ*. The Apostles,

recalling Christ's promise on the days between the Ascension and Pentecost, will focus their every thought and sentiment on that *veni* — come!

6. *Veni, Sancte Spiritus!* Thus beginning her invocation to the Holy Spirit, the Church makes her own the substance of the Apostles' prayer as they gathered with Mary in the Upper Room; indeed, she extends it in history and makes it ever timely.

Veni, Sancte Spiritus! Thus she says over and over in every corner of the earth, her fervour unchanged, firmly aware that she must remain in the Upper Room, always awaiting the Spirit. At the same time, she knows that she must leave the Upper Room and travel the world's roads, with the ever new task of bearing witness to the mystery of the Spirit.

Veni, Sancte Spiritus! So we pray with Mary, sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, a most precious dwelling-place of Christ among us, so that she may help us to be living temples of the Spirit and tireless witnesses of the Gospel.

Veni, Sancte Spiritus! Veni, Sancte Spiritus! Veni, Sancte Spiritus! Amen!