



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II GENERAL AUDIENCE Wednesday 17 June 1998 1. At the Last Supper Jesus had said to the Apostles: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (*Jn* 16:7). On the evening of Easter Day, Jesus keeps his promise: he appears to the Eleven gathered in the Upper Room, breathes on them and says: “Receive the Holy Spirit” (*Jn* 20:22). Fifty days later, on Pentecost, occurs “the definitive manifestation of what had already been accomplished in the same Upper Room on Easter Sunday” (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, n. 25). The Acts of the Apostles has preserved a description of the event for us (cf. *Acts* 2:1-4). By reflecting on this text, we can discern some features of the Holy Spirit’s mysterious identity. 2. It is first of all important to see the connection between the Jewish feast of Pentecost and the first Christian Pentecost. Initially, Pentecost was the feast of seven weeks (cf. *Tb* 2:1), the harvest feast (cf. *Ex* 23:16), when the new grain was offered to God (cf. *Nm* 28:26; *Dt* 16:9). Later on the feast acquired a new meaning: it became the feast of the Covenant God had made with his people on Sinai, when he gave Israel his law. St Luke describes the Pentecost event as a theophany, a manifestation of God similar to the one on Mt Sinai (cf. *Ex* 19:16-25): a roaring sound, a mighty wind, tongues of fire. The message is clear: Pentecost is the new Sinai; the Holy Spirit is the New Covenant; it is the gift of the new law. St Augustine keenly grasps this connection: “Here is a great and wondrous mystery, brethren: if you observe closely, on the day of Pentecost [the Jews] received the law written by the finger of God and on the same day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came” (*Ser. Mai.*, 158, 4). And an Eastern Father, Severian of Gabala, notes: “It was fitting that the grace of the Holy Spirit should be given on the same day that the old law was given” (*Cat. in Act. Apost.*, 2, 1). 3. The promise made to the fathers is thus fulfilled. We read in the prophet Jeremiah: “*This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts*” (*Jer* 31:33). And in the prophet Ezekiel: “*A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances*” (*Ez* 36:26-27). In what way is the Holy Spirit the new and eternal Covenant? By taking away sin and pouring the love of God into the human heart: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death” (*Rom* 8:2). The law of Moses pointed out obligations, but could not change the human heart. A new heart was needed, and that is precisely what God offers us by virtue of the redemption accomplished by Jesus. The Father removes our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh like Christ’s, enlivened by the Holy Spirit who enables us to act out of love (cf. *Rom* 5:5). On the basis of this gift, a new Covenant is established between God and humanity. St Thomas Aquinas says with keen insight that the Holy Spirit himself is the New Covenant, producing love in us, the fullness of the law (cf. *Comment. in 2 Cor.*, 3, 6). 4. On Pentecost the Holy Spirit descends and the Church is born. The Church is the community of those who are “begotten from above”, “by water and the Spirit”, as we read in John’s Gospel (cf. *Jn* 3:3, 5). The Christian community is not primarily the result of the free decision of believers; at its origin there is first and foremost the gratuitous initiative of the Love of God, who offers the gift of the

Holy Spirit. The as- sent of faith to this gift of love is a “response” to grace and is itself motivated by grace. Therefore, between the Holy Spirit and the Church there exists a deep and indissoluble bond. St Irenaeus says in this regard: “Wherever the Church is, the Spirit of God is also there; and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, the Church is there and every grace” (*Adv. Haer.*, III, 24, 1). Then we can understand St Augustine’s daring expression: “The Holy Spirit is possessed in so far as one loves the Church” (*In Io.*, 32, 8). The account of the Pentecost event emphasizes that the Church is universal at her birth: this is the significance of the list of peoples — Parthians, Medes, Elamites, etc. (cf. *Acts* 2:9-11) — who hear the first proclamation made by Peter. The Holy Spirit is given to all people of every race and nation, and accomplishes in them the new unity of Christ’s Mystical Body. St John Chrysostom highlights the communion brought about by the Holy Spirit with the vivid observation: “He who dwells in Rome knows those in the Indies to be his members” (*In Io.*, 65, 1; *PG* 59, 361).⁵ Since the Holy Spirit is “the New Covenant”, the work of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity consists in making the risen Lord present and, with him, God the Father. The Spirit carries out his saving action by making God’s presence *immediate*. The new and eternal Covenant consists in this: God can now be reached by each one of us. Everyone, “from the least to the greatest” (cf. *Jer* 31:34), is given in a certain sense a *direct* knowledge of the Lord, as we read in the First Letter of St John: “The anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him” (1 *Jn* 2:27). Thus the promise Jesus made to his disciples at the Last Supper is fulfilled: “The 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). Through the Holy Spirit, our meeting with the Lord occurs in the ordinary context of *filial* life, in the “face to face” encounter of friendship, in the experience of God as Father, Brother, Friend and Bridegroom. This is Pentecost. This is the New

Covenant.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said: I warmly greet the students of the Pontifical Beda College who will be ordained deacons this afternoon, as well as their families and friends. I extend a special greeting to the priests from the Diocese of Scranton on pilgrimage to Rome and the Holy Land. I also welcome the Buddhist group *Rissho Kosei Kai* and the Shinto group *Omoto-Kyo*, from Japan. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Singapore, Japan, Canada and the United States of America, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.