



The Holy See

PENTECOST VIGIL

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Saturday, 10 June 2000

1. *"When the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me"* (Jn 15: 26).

These are the words that the Evangelist John received from Christ's lips in the Upper Room, during the Last Supper on the eve of his Passion. Today they resound with remarkable intensity for us on Pentecost of this Jubilee Year, whose deepest meaning they reveal.

To understand this essential message, one must *remain in the Upper Room*, as the disciples did. This is why the Church, through a fitting selection of liturgical texts, *has remained in the Upper Room* throughout the Easter season. This evening St Peter's Square is transformed into a vast Upper Room in which our community has gathered to pray for and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, reminded us of what happened in Jerusalem 50 days after Easter. Before ascending into heaven Christ had entrusted a great task to the Apostles: "Go ... and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28: 19-20). He had also promised that after his departure they would receive "another Counselor", who would teach them all things (cf. Jn 14: 16, 26).

This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost: the Spirit, descending upon the Apostles, gave them the necessary light and strength to teach the nations and to proclaim Christ's Gospel to them all. In this way the Church was born and lives *in the fruitful tension between the Upper Room and the world*, between prayer and proclamation.

2. When he promised the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus had spoken of him as the "*Counselor*" and "*Paraclete*" whom he would send from the Father (cf. *Jn 15: 26*). He had spoken of him as the "*Spirit of truth*" who would guide the Church into all the truth (*16: 13*). He had explained that the Holy Spirit would bear witness to him (cf. *Jn 15: 26*), but had immediately added: "And you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning" (*Jn 15: 27*). Now that the Spirit descends on the community gathered in the Upper Room on Pentecost, this *twofold witness* begins: that of the Holy Spirit and that of the Apostles.

The witness of the Spirit is *divine* in itself: it comes *from the depth of the Trinitarian mystery*. The Apostles' witness is *human*: It transmits, in the light of revelation, their *experience of life with Jesus*. In laying the foundations of the Church, *Christ attaches great importance to the human witness of the Apostles*. He wants the Church to live *by the historical truth of his Incarnation*, so that through the work of witnesses the memory of his Death on the cross and of his Resurrection may always be alive and in her.

3. "*And you also are witnesses*" (*Jn 15: 27*). Enlivened by the gift of the Spirit, the Church has always been keenly aware of this duty and has faithfully proclaimed the Gospel message in every time and place. She has done so with respect for the dignity of peoples, of their culture, of their traditions. Indeed, she knows quite well that the divine message entrusted to her is not hostile to the deepest human aspirations; indeed, it was revealed by God to satisfy, beyond every expectation, the hunger and thirst of the human heart. For this very reason the Gospel must not be *imposed* but *proposed*, because it can only be effective if it is freely accepted and lovingly embraced.

As happened in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost, in every age Christ's witnesses, filled with the Holy Spirit, have felt impelled to reach out to others in order to express in various languages the marvels God has accomplished. This continues to happen in our time as well, and is the emphasis of this *Jubilee Day* dedicated to "*reflection on the duties of Catholics towards others: proclamation of Christ, witness and dialogue*".

The reflection we are invited to make cannot fail to dwell above all on *the work which the Holy Spirit carries out in individuals and in communities*. It is the Holy Spirit who scatters the "seeds of the Word" in the various customs and cultures, preparing the peoples of the most varied regions to accept the Gospel message. This awareness cannot fail to instil in Christ's disciples an attitude of openness and dialogue towards those with different religious convictions. Indeed, it is only right to listen to what the Spirit can also suggest to "others". They can offer useful hints for reaching a deeper understanding of what the Christian already possesses in the "*revealed desposit*". Dialogue can thus open the way to a proclamation which is better suited to the personal conditions of the listener.

4. However, if the proclamation is to be effective, *a lived witness* remains crucial. Only the believer

who lives what he professes with his lips has any hope of being heard. One must bear in mind that circumstances at times do not permit an explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of all. It is then that the witness of a life that is respectful, chaste, detached from riches and free from the powers of this world, in a word, the witness of holiness, can reveal all its convincing power, even if offered in silence.

It is also clear that our firmness in being witnesses of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit does not prevent us from collaborating *in the service of man* with those who belong to other religions. On the contrary, it prompts us to work together with them for the good of society and peace in the world.

At the dawn of the third millennium, Christ's disciples are fully aware that this world appears as "a map of various religions" (*Redemptor hominis*, n. 11). If the Church's children know how to remain open to the Holy Spirit's action, he will help them communicate Christ's one, universal saving message in a way that respects the religious convictions of others.

5. "*He will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning*" (Jn 15: 26-27). The whole logic of Revelation and the faith by which the Church lives is contained in these words: the witness of the Holy Spirit, which flows from the depth of the Trinitarian mystery of God, and the human witness of the Apostles, linked to their historical experience of Christ. *Both are necessary*. To be more precise, it is *a single witness*: it is the Spirit who continues to speak to our contemporaries in the language and life of those who are Christ's disciples today.

On the day when we celebrate the memorial of the Church's birth, we want to express *heartfelt gratitude to God* for this *twofold*, and ultimately *one*, witness, which has involved the great family of the Church since the day of Pentecost. We want to give thanks for the witness of the first community of Jerusalem which, through the generations of martyrs and confessors, has become the inheritance of countless men and women down the ages around the world.

Encouraged by the memory of the first Pentecost, the Church today eagerly awaits a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Devoted with one accord to prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, she never ceases to cry out: "Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth" (cf. *Ps* 103: 30).

Veni, Sancte Spiritus: Come, Holy Spirit, kindle in the hearts of your faithful the fire of your love!
Sancte Spiritus, veni!

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