



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GREAT BRITAIN

HOLY MASS OF PENTECOST

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Solemnity of Pentecost

Coventry, 30 May 1982

My dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

1. Peace be with you. On this great feast of Pentecost, I greet all of you who have come from so many parishes in the Province of Birmingham and beyond. I also greet our beloved brothers and sisters from other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities, whose presence bears witness to our one Baptism in Jesus Christ and to our openness to the one Holy Spirit. And so my first words to you all are: "Peace be with you".

We are close to the city of Coventry, a city devastated by war but rebuilt in hope. The ruins of the old Cathedral and the building of the new are recognized throughout the world as *a symbol of Christian reconciliation and peace*. We pray at his Mass: "Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth." In this prayer we call upon God to enable us to bring about that reconciliation and peace not simply in symbol, but in reality too.

2. Our world is disfigured by war and violence. The ruins of the old Cathedral constantly remind our society of its *capacity to destroy*. And today that capacity is *greater than ever*. People are having to live under the shadow of a nuclear nightmare. Yet people everywhere long for peace.

Men and women of good will desire to make common cause in their search for a worldwide community of brotherhood and understanding. They long for justice, yes, but for justice filled with mercy. Being so close as we are to Shakespeare's birthplace we would do well to consider this:

“that in the course of justice none of us should see salvation. We do pray for mercy and that same prayer doth teach all of us to render the deeds of mercy.”

What is this peace for which we long? What is this peace symbolized by the new Cathedral of Coventry? Peace is not just the absence of war. It involves mutual respect and confidence between peoples and nations. It involves collaboration and binding agreements. *Like a cathedral, peace has to be constructed, patiently and with unshakeable faith.*

Wherever the strong exploit the weak; wherever the rich take advantage of the poor; wherever great powers seek to dominate and to impose ideologies, there the work of making peace is undone; there the cathedral of peace is again destroyed. Today, the scale and the horror of *modern warfare* - whether nuclear or not - makes it *totally unacceptable as a means of settling differences* between nations. War should belong to the tragic past, to history; it should find no place on humanity's agenda for the future.

And so, this morning, I invite you to pray with me for the cause of peace. Let us pray earnestly for the Special Session of the United Nations on Disarmament which begins soon. The voices of Christians join with others in urging the leaders of the world to abandon confrontation and to turn their backs on policies which require the nations to spend vast sums of money for weapons of mass destruction. We pray this Pentecost that the Holy Spirit may inspire the leaders of the world to engage in fruitful dialogue. May the Holy Spirit lead them to adopt peaceful ways of safeguarding liberty which do not involve the threat of nuclear disaster.

Yet the cathedral of peace is built of many small stones. Each person has to become a stone in that beautiful edifice. All people must deliberately and resolutely commit themselves to the pursuit of peace. Mistrust and division between nations begin in the heart of individuals. Work for peace starts when we listen to *the urgent call of Christ: "Repent and believe in the gospel"* (Marc. 1, 15). We must turn from domination to service; we must turn from violence to peace; we must turn from ourselves to Christ, who alone can give us a new heart, a new understanding. Each individual, at some moment in his or her life, is destined to hear this call from Christ. Each person's response leads to death or to life. Faith in Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, will bring us into the way of peace.

3. I would now like to speak especially to the young people who are about to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. Today's Gospel has special meaning for you, for it says that Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you', and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.' After saying this he breathed on them and said: '*Receive the Holy Spirit*' (Io. 20, 20-22).

Christ's gift of the Holy Spirit is going to be poured out upon you in a particular way. You will hear

the words of the Church spoken over you, calling upon the Holy Spirit *to confirm your faith, to seal you in his love, to strengthen you for his service*. You will then take your place among fellow-Christians throughout the world, full citizens now of the People of God. You will witness to the truth of the Gospel in the name of Jesus Christ. You will live your lives in such a way as to make holy all human life. Together with all the confirmed, you will become living stones in the cathedral of peace. Indeed you are called by God to be instruments of his peace.

4. Today you must understand that you are not alone. We are one body, one people, one Church of Christ. The sponsor who stands at your side represents for you the whole community. Together, with a great crowd of witnesses drawn from all peoples and every age, you represent Christ. *You are young people who have received a mission from Christ*, for he says to you today: “As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.”

Let me recall for a moment *the memory of two great Englishmen* who can inspire you today. Study the example of *Saint Boniface*, born at Crediton in Devon, one of your greatest fellow-countrymen and also *one of the Church’s greatest missionaries*. And the Holy Spirit, given to Boniface through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, strengthened his personal love for Christ and brought him to a maturity of faith. This faith radiated through his whole life. He longed to share it with others, even with those in other lands. And so, with complete trust in God and with courage and perseverance, he helped to establish the Church on the continent of Europe. You, too, must show courage and perseverance in living by the standards of the Gospel in all the circumstances of your lives.

I cannot come to the Midlands without remembering that great man of God, *that pilgrim for truth, Cardinal John Henry Newman*. His quest for God and for the fullness of truth - a sign of the Holy Spirit at work within him - brought him to a prayerfulness and a wisdom which still inspire us today. Indeed Cardinal Newman’s many years of seeking a fuller understanding of the faith reflect his abiding confidence in the words of Christ: “I shall ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever, that Spirit of truth whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows him” (*Jo. 14, 16-17*). And so I commend to you his example of persevering faith and longing for the truth. He can help you to draw nearer to God, in whose presence he lived, and to whose service he gave himself totally. His teaching has great importance today in our search for Christian unity too, not only in this country but throughout the world. Imitate his humility and his obedience to God; pray for a wisdom like his, a wisdom that can come from God alone.

5. “Jesus breathed on them and said: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained’.”

On that first Pentecost our Saviour gave the Apostles the power to forgive sins when he poured into their hearts the gift of the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit comes to you today in the Sacrament of Confirmation, to involve you more completely in the Church’s fight against sin and in

her mission of fostering holiness. He comes to dwell more fully in your hearts and *to strengthen you for the struggle with evil*. My dear young people, the world of today needs you, for it needs men and women who are filled with the Holy Spirit. It needs your courage and hopefulness, your faith and your perseverance. The world of tomorrow will be built by you. Today you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit so that you may work with deep faith and with abiding charity, so that you may help to bring to the world the fruits of reconciliation and peace. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit and his manifold gifts, commit yourselves wholeheartedly to the Church's struggle against sin. Strive to be unselfish; try not to be obsessed with material things. Be active members of the People of God; be reconciled with each other and devoted to the work of justice, which will bring peace on earth.

6. "How many are your works, O Lord!" (*Ps.* 104, 24).

These words of the responsorial psalm evoke gratitude from our hearts and a hymn of praise from our lips. Indeed *how many are the works of the Lord*, how great are the effects of the Holy Spirit's action in Confirmation! When this sacrament is conferred, the words of the psalm are fulfilled among us: "You send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth" (*Ibid.* 30).

On the first day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles and upon Mary and filled them with his power. Today we remember that moment and *we open ourselves again to the gift of that same Holy Spirit*. In that Spirit we are baptized. In that Spirit we are confirmed. In that Spirit we are called to share in the mission of Christ. In that Spirit we shall indeed become the People of Pentecost, the apostles of our time. "Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love." Amen.

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