



The Holy See

MASS OF PENTECOST

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 3 June 2001

1. "And they were all full of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2,4).

Thus it happened at Jerusalem on *Pentecost*. Today, gathered in this square, heart of the Catholic world, we relive the climate of that day. Even in our own day, as in the Upper Room at Jerusalem, a "strong wind" blows through the Church. She experiences the divine breath of the Spirit who opens her for the evangelization of the world.

By a happy coincidence, in our solemnity today we have the joy of hosting, beside the altar, *the venerated relics of Bl. John XXIII*, whom God formed with his Spirit making him a wonderful witness of his love. My venerable predecessor passed to the better life on *3 June 1963*, 38 years ago, while in St Peter's Square a great crowd of the faithful were praying for him, spiritually gathered around him as he lay on his death bed. Our present celebration rejoins that prayer and, while we commemorate the Blessed Pope, we give praise to God who gave him to the Church and to the world.

As Priest, Bishop and Pope, Bl. Angelo Roncalli was docile to the action of the Holy Spirit who guided him on the way of holiness. And so with the living communion of saints, I want to celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost, particularly attuned to him, and guided by some of his spiritual reflections.

2. "The light of the Holy Spirit breaks forth from the first words of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles.... The intense movement of the divine Spirit precedes and accompagnies the evangelizers and breaks into the souls of those who listen, while extending the confines of the

Catholic Church to the ends of the earth, allowing her to traverse all the centuries of history" (*Discorsi Messaggi Colloqui del S. Padre Giovanni XXIII*, II, p. 398).

With these words, spoken on Pentecost 1960, Pope John helped us to grasp the unlimited missionary impulse proper to the mystery we celebrate on this solemnity. The Church is *born as missionary*, because she is born *of the Father* who sent Christ into the world, she is born *of the Son* who, dead and risen, sent the Apostles to all nations, and she is born of the *Holy Spirit*, who pours out on them the necessary light and force to accomplish their mission.

Even in her distinctive missionary dimension, the Church is the icon of the Holy Trinity: for she reflects in history the superabundant fruitfulness proper to God himself, the subsisting fount of love who generates life and communion.

With her presence and action in the world, the Church propagates among men this mysterious dynamism, spreading the kingdom of God that "is justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (*Rom* 14,17).

3. The *Second Vatican Council*, announced, summoned and opened by Pope John XXIII, was aware of the missionary vocation of the Church.

We can say that the *Holy Spirit* was the *protagonist* of the Council, from the time the Pope convoked it, declaring that he had received the idea as an interior voice from on high that resounded in his spirit (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Humanae salutis*, 25 December 1961, n. 6). That "light breeze" became a "strong wind" and the conciliar event took the form of a renewed Pentecost. "It is in the doctrine and spirit of Pentecost", Pope John affirmed, "that the great event of the Ecumenical Council takes its substance and life" (*Discorsi Messaggi Colloqui*, cit., p. 398). If today, brothers and sisters, we remember that singular ecclesial season, it is because *the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 was placed in continuity with the Second Vatican Council*. It reposed many aspects of conciliar doctrine and method. And the recent *Extraordinary Consistory* reposed its ongoing value and richness for new Christian generations. All this is for us a further motive of gratitude to Bl. Pope John XXIII.

4. In particular, within the present celebration, which associates with Pentecost a solemn act of veneration, I wish to emphasize that the most precious gift that Pope John left to the People of God was himself, *his witness of holiness*.

What he affirmed of the saints also applies to him, "*each of them is a masterpiece of the Holy Spirit*", (ibid., p. 400). And thinking of the saints and martyrs buried in St Peter's, he added a comment that it is moving to think of today: "*Sometimes the relics of their bodies are reduced to a few bones; but their memory and prayer continue to palpitate in them*" (ibid., p. 400). He exclaimed: "Oh, the saints, the saints of the Lord, who everywhere delight us, encourage

us and bless us" (ibid., p. 401).

These expressions of Pope John, reinforced by the luminous example of his life, reveal the importance of the aspiration to *holiness as the privileged way of the Church* at the beginning of the new millennium (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte* nn. 30-31). The generous will to collaborate with the Spirit in one's own sanctification and that of one's brothers is in fact a preliminary and indispensable condition for the new evangelization.

5. If evangelization requires holiness, in turn holiness requires the *nourishment of the spiritual life*: prayer and intimate union with God by means of the Word and of the Sacraments. In a word, it requires a profound and personal *life of the Spirit*.

How can we not remember, even in this regard, the rich spiritual legacy left us by the Bl. John XXIII in his Journal of the Soul? In those pages one can admire at first hand the daily effort, even from his days in the seminary, which he brought to *the desire to correspond fully with the action of the Holy Spirit*. Each day he let himself be formed by the Spirit, with patient tenacity striving to be conformed ever more to his will. Here is the secret of the goodness with which he won over the People of God and so many persons of good will.

6. Entrusting ourselves to his intercession, today I wish to ask the Lord that *the grace of the great Jubilee be spread throughout the new millennium, by the witness of Christian holiness*. We confidently confess that holiness is possible. It is possible by the action of the Spirit, the Paraclete, who according to the promise of Christ, always remains with us.

Inspired by sure hope, we can use the same words as Bl. John XXIII to pray: "O Holy Spirit, Paraclete, perfect in us the work begun by Jesus: enable us to continue to pray fervently in the name of the whole world: hasten in everyone of us the growth of a profound interior life; give vigour to our apostolate so that it may reach all men and all peoples, all redeemed by the Blood of Christ and all belonging to him. Mortify in us our natural pride, and raise us to the realms of holy humility, of real fear of God, of generous courage. Let no earthly bond prevent us from honouring our vocation, no cowardly considerations disturb the claims of justice, no meanness confine the immensity of charity within the narrow bounds of petty selfishness. Let everything in us be on a grand scale: the search for truth and the devotion to it, and readiness for self-sacrifice, even to the cross and death; and may everything finally be according to the last prayer of the Son to his heavenly Father, and according to the pouring out of your Spirit, O Holy Spirit of love, whom the Father and the Son desired to be poured out over the Church and her institutions, over the souls of men and of nations." (*Discorsi Messaggi Colloqui*, cit., IV, p. 350).

Come, Holy Spirit, come. Amen.
