

The Rev. Daren J. Zehnle
Annunciation Parish, Shumway, Illinois
10 May 2008

The Solemnity of Pentecost

As America celebrates today Mother's Day, the Church, too, celebrates Mother's Day in a way more particular and more profound. Today we celebrate the great Solemnity of Pentecost, the day on which the Lord Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and on which Holy Mother Church was born from the pierced side of Christ.

When the Holy Father Benedict XVI visited this nation only a few weeks ago, he prayed repeatedly for a new Pentecost, a new springtime. He said, "I have come to repeat the Apostle's urgent call to conversion and the forgiveness of sins, and to implore from the Lord a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church in this country."¹

The action of the Holy Spirit is intimately connected with the grace of sincere repentance and conversion and for this reason the Holy Spirit gives to the Apostles the authority to forgive sins. Indeed, the Holy Spirit, "the Lord and giver of life" is given to us so that we might live new lives in Christ. We must then remain open to his promptings to conversion.

A genuine renewal of faith will only occur if we recover the awareness of sin and of the consequences of sin, if we

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 17 April 2008.

return to the Lord in the sacrament of Penance, seeking his mercy that is our salvation and our life.

Who could deny that we need a new outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit? How many today are unaware that "the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:5)? How many today live as though the new life given them by the Holy Spirit means nothing? How many are unaware of the great dignity and holiness to which they are called by virtue of their Baptism?

So many today live in darkness, unable or unwilling to see Christ, "the light of life" (John 8:12). They live their lives either in gloom and despair or in apathy and indifference. They fill their days with so many things, all in the vain attempt to find the life for which they yearn. Yes, Lord, "send out your Spirit ... and renew the face of the earth" (Psalm 104:30)!

It takes only a moment's glance around us to see how deeply we need to be renewed by the Spirit.

Who can deny that the present moment is a crossroads... It is a time of great promise, as we see the human family in many ways drawing closer together and becoming ever more interdependent. Yet at the same time we see clear signs of a disturbing breakdown in the very foundations of society: signs of alienation, anger and polarization on the part of many of our contemporaries; increased violence; a weakening of the moral sense; a coarsening of social relations; and a growing forgetfulness of Christ and God. The Church, too, sees signs of immense promise in her many strong parishes and vital movements, in the enthusiasm for the faith shown by so many young people, in the number of those who each year embrace the Catholic faith, and in a greater interest

in prayer and catechesis. At the same time she senses, often painfully, the presence of division and polarization in her midst, as well as the troubling realization that many of the baptized, rather than acting as spiritual leaven in the world, are inclined to embrace attitudes contrary to the truth of the Gospel.²

Yes, we are at a crossroads, both individually and collectively, and there are two ways we can turn, either towards the Lord or away from him.

As we stand at the crossroads, we are all too aware of the many questions and fears that arise within our hearts and so we, like the disciples, often lock the doors of our hearts in the vain attempt to be secure. The more we try to secure ourselves the less secure we feel; the longer we wait with locked hearts the more fearful we become and the more we yearn for life.

Too many people today refuse to unlock their hearts to the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. So many today are like the prodigal son who wanted all that life could give and they want it now.

He wanted to enjoy it to the full - living, only living, immersed in life's abundance, missing none of the valuable things it can offer. In the end he found himself caring for pigs and even envying those animals - his life had become so empty and useless. And his freedom was proving useless.³

In his example, and in the example of countless others like him, we realize all too well that

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, Meeting with the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, 3 June 2006.

when all people want from life is to take possession of it, it becomes ever emptier and poorer; it is easy to end up seeking refuge in drugs, in the great deception. And doubts surface as to whether, in the end, life is truly a good.⁴

And because they - even some among us today - live without God and do not sincerely and continually seek him and open themselves to the workings of the Spirit - they remain in fear. They are afraid of God's power, of his love, of his will. But there is nothing to fear in God, for when we allow him into our hearts and lives he says, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19)!

As he offers his peace to us and as we accept his peace, the Holy Spirit leads us to true conversion and we receive the Lord's mercy in the Sacrament of Penance, thereby receiving life and salvation.

This life, true life and in abundance, is the heart of the Gospel! This life is given to the world through the Church, our Mother, through the Sacraments entrusted to her. It is the mission of the Church to proclaim this life anew to every generation and to lead all people to this life, to bring all people together in the Church, the Body of Christ.

Let each of us then approach the Church to receive the grace of Christ given through the Sacraments, which have origin in the pierced side of Christ.

⁴ *Ibid.*

For true life - our salvation - can only be found in the reconciliation, freedom and love which are God's gracious gift. This is the message of hope we are called to proclaim and embody in a world where self-centeredness, greed, violence, and cynicism so often seem to choke the fragile growth of grace in people's hearts.⁵

We must beg the Holy Spirit to awaken in our hearts and greater awareness of this truth. We must follow his promptings to be reconciled with God and so be filled with his joy and love. We must beg the Lord to pour upon us anew the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we received in Baptism and in Confirmation. Not only this, but we must open ourselves to these gifts and cooperate with the grace the Lord gives us.

The power of the Holy Spirit will help us to live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Let us follow the example of Holy Mary and prayer for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a new Pentecost. With her, let us pray: "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love! Amen."

⁵ *Ibid.*, Homily, 19 April 2008.