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31 May 2009

The Solemnity of Pentecost

Before he took his seat at the right hand of the Father, the Lord Jesus told his Apostles: "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

Humanity has always yearned for power, yet the power the Holy Spirit bestows is quite different from the power typically sought.

In the Book of Genesis we find a passage that relates to the first reading and helps to explain both that reading and humanity's thirst for power.

Humanity sought to "build a tower with its top in the sky," to bridge the gap between the human and the divine "and so make a name for ourselves" (Genesis 11:4). Seeking to raise itself to the heights of divinity, humanity fell yet again for the cruel and cunning lie of the serpent: "you will be like God" (Genesis 2:5).

Mankind endeavored to build that great tower at Babel because we feared being "scattered all over the earth" (Genesis 11:4). Until that moment, "the whole world spoke the same language, using the same words" (Genesis 11:1). A common

language is a sign of profound unity; humanity feared being separated and divided.

Presuming too much, what was feared came to pass; men trusted too much in their own power and saw God not as the author of life and freedom, but as a rival to be withstood. Consequently, "the Lord scattered them all over the earth" and "confused the speech of all the world" (Genesis 11:7-8).

Recall what happened when the first man and woman - Adam and Eve - presumed too much and sought to be like God: sin and death entered the world and they were divided from one another and from God. They turned inward, focusing on themselves, and tried to use each other and God for their own personal gain. In confusing the speech of humanity the Lord acted not in a vindictive manner, but saved mankind from a much more fatal consequence; his action is an act of mercy.

On the great day of Pentecost, the Lord healed this division with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Having been anointed with the Spirit, the Apostles proclaimed the Gospel and people "from every nation under heaven ... heard them speaking in his own language" and the Church was born (Acts 2:5-6).

But let us return to that presumption of man that trusted in its own power. Is it any different in our own day? Are we not trying to build one common society on our own, without God? Are we not trying to unite commerce, language and thought into

one global society, with no real consideration given to God? Unless we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us, this great undertaking of man will collapse.

Do not countless people still see God as a rival? Is this not what the world continually tells us, that God and religion takes away our freedom and place limits on our power, taking away our happiness? If we accept these lies, we, too, will fall for the lie of the serpent.

Can any one of us make ourselves happy? Can any one of us - of our own power - ascend to the glory of heaven? Happiness and glory - the true and liberating power of love - come from the Holy Spirit; these are the gifts he gives, the gift that is God himself.

Christ Jesus stands today in our midst and shows us his hands - the proof of his love - to give us the spoils of his battle, his peace, even as he breathes his great gift upon us, the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 20:20-22).

Humanity was not looking for this gift and many turned away from him, seeking other things. What of you and me?

We too would expect quite different gifts from a Redeemer... For we would expect a house, money, good food, travel, success, other people's esteem, comfort, peace, security. But not the Holy Spirit. For in reality the Holy Spirit is largely the opposite of all these things: he makes us restless with our possessions, our comfort, our respect that is so often based on dubious compromises. He is a tempest. He does not let us settle down in our comfort but exposes us to ridicule by putting us in the service of

truth and obliging us to exercise the self-control that loves the other person "as myself..." And yet, this tempest that frees man from himself and makes him true and kind, is it not the most radical of all revolutions, the only real hope for the world?¹

Because this revolution turns man's gaze away from himself toward God and others, the Psalmist sings, "When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth" (Psalm 104:30).

It is this gift of conversion - this revolution - the Lord promised to send us in his Spirit. So often, we want to "do something" to receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

Yet this power, the grace of the Spirit, is not something we can merit or achieve, but only receive as pure gift. God's love can only unleash its power when it is allowed to change us from within. We have to let it break through the hard crust of our indifference, our spiritual weariness, our blind conformity to the spirit of this age. Only then can we let it ignite our imagination and shape our deepest desires.²

We must follow the example of Mary and the Apostles, who waiting in the Upper Room for the coming of the Spirit. How did they occupy themselves during their eight days of waiting? They spent their time in humble and silent prayer. We must do the same.

If we quiet ourselves and are still, we will be able to open the doors of our hearts to the Holy Spirit, who will then

¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Seek That Which is Above: Meditations Through the Year*. Graham Harrison, trans. (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 2007), 103-104.

² Pope Benedict XVI, [Homily](#), 20 July 2008.

unleash his transforming power within us who will fill us with the fruits of his grace: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

This is within his power; this is his true gift, the gift of union with God and with one another, united in Christ, in his Body, the Church. Let each of us cry out: "Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth" (Psalm)! Amen.