

Solemnity of Pentecost – June 5, 2022 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham – 7:15am, 8:30am, 11:00am Sunday Masses – 765 words

We tend to think of the Pentecost event as the time when the Holy Spirit was first given to the Church. But as the gospel taught us, the Lord Jesus had already given the gift of the Spirit to his apostles within hours of his Resurrection – on the very evening of Easter. “Receive the Holy Spirit”, he said, as he breathed upon them. They already had the gift then! But they had not yet been sent. That is what happened on Pentecost, when that gift was stirred up in them and they were impelled out into the world to share the gift with others, to the ends of the earth.

Another way of looking at it is, Pentecost was the moment when Easter was to start being applied to everyone. Christ had overcome sin and death; he rose from the dead, to die no more. And he did all of that so that he where went, we might follow. The gift of the Spirit, applied to us through the sacraments that have come down to us from Christ through the Apostles, through the Church, is manifested at Pentecost and the Church is set in motion. This gift is given not to be held onto for one’s personal benefit alone, but to be shared for the benefit of all.

Thus St. Paul said in the second reading that “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.” The gift of God which is his Spirit, and which is the source of all his other gifts, is one that brings unity out of diversity. It falls to each of us not only to discern the gifts we have but to put them to the service of the Church.

The beautiful Sequence for this feast gives us much food for thought in regard to how we can put our gifts at the service of others, and ultimately to the service of the Church, for it describes the action of the Holy Spirit in very concrete terms: as a “Father of the poor”, as a “comforter”, as “sweet refreshment”... “coolness in the heat”, “solace in the midst of woe”, the healer of wounds, one who can “bend the stubborn heart and will”, and “guide the steps that go astray”. All of these are things that we can share in, things that we can do.

Therefore, we can ask: How do I provide for the poor? How do I offer comfort to others? How do I seek to refresh others, help them find relief? Am I a source of solace – am I there for those who are hurting or mourning? Do I try to be a healer and a peacemaker? Am I willing to dialogue with the stubborn and the inflexible to help them find a place of healthy compromise? And do I correct those who are erring? All these things have their source in the gift of the Holy Spirit – and we can be his hands, his feet, his mouthpiece in these works.

Indeed, there could be a temptation to read this passage from St. Paul about the gifts that are put to the service of the Church and think more in terms of serving in ministries and activities – as a lector or usher, for example. But that is too narrow of a reading. Many do not feel called to serve in those areas, but they still have some share in the Spirit that can be of benefit to others. I think the Sequence provides us with much food for thought in that regard, and we would all do well to meditate on it and consider our lives and our relations with others in its light.

Yes, the gift of the Spirit is one that is never just for us, but is always meant to be shared. When we do share it, we contribute, each in our own way, to building up the Body of Christ, which is his Church. What a wonderful mosaic or tapestry the Church is: such diversity and variety, but all drawn together into one through the Spirit of God. As the Spirit animates our worship on this great feast day and every time we approach the altar, let us ask him to help us understand better how he has set us in motion to help bring his gift to the ends of the earth.