

Sunday: the mission, at the school of the Holy Spirit *with the Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit, Source of All Mission

Pilgrim friends,

Yesterday we marched under the patronage of Saint Francis de Sales, the indefatigable apostle of the Chablais, crisscrossing his Protestant land in all directions to distribute doctrinal tracts, to discuss with the Protestants, to sow his prayer and his goodness. Today, Pentecost Sunday, **he is not a saint**

who accompanies us, but the

makes the saints, the one who makes the missionaries, the theme of our pilgrimage; it is the Holy Spirit who makes the word of the missionaries fruitful, who makes it alive and effective. And the texts of today's liturgy remind us of this wonderfully.



Pentecost, by Juan Bautista Maino (1581-1649), Prado Museum, Madrid

When the Holy Spirit acts: Pentecost, the first mission in the history of the Church

The apostles were gathered in the Upper Room, locked up for fear of the Jews. This fear is understandable. For the crowd gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost is the same that only fifty-two days ago called for the death of Jesus, shouted to Pilate: "*Crucify him!*" »

Now the Holy Spirit having descended on the apostles, the latter, forgetting their fear, went out to meet the crowd. And Saint Peter speaks. **Let us listen to the first homily of the first pope:** "*Men of Israel, listen to the following words. It is Jesus the Nazarene! **This man you have suppressed by nailing him to the wood by the hand of the impious.***"

But God raised him from the dead, delivering him from the pains of death. And it is of him that David speaks in the psalm: "I saw the **Lord** before me without ceasing". This Jesus, God has raised him up; We are all **witnesses to this**. Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Turn away from this crooked generation, and you will be saved.¹ Everything is there! The witness of faith, the call to conversion in Christ Jesus, true man, true God (for Lord), put to death and risen for our salvation: this is the proclamation of the "kerygma", that is, of the essential "message" of faith. What courage! What audacity! Who speaks? Was it not Peter who trembled before a simple servant, who denied his master three times? But Jesus had prophesied this radical conversion: "When the Holy Spirit descends upon you, you will receive strength, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." **First lesson: the Holy Spirit is a spirit of strength, which impels us to bear witness to Christ with courage.**

And what happens next? Did the crowd throw themselves on the apostles to lynch them? No, on the contrary, the Acts of the Apostles relate:

"When they heard [this], their hearts were pierced, and they said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' Jesus had announced it:

"When the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world of his sin." **Second teaching: the Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth, it is he who acts in the depths of hearts to touch and convert them: he urges us to proclaim the truth, without compromise.**

But the strong words of Saint Peter are soon accompanied by a gentleness, a consolation, a true charity: "Brothers, I know well that you have acted out of ignorance, as have your magistrates, [...] It was to you first that God, having raised up his servant, sent him to bless you, turning each one of you away from his iniquities. Third **teaching: The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, he is an anointing that gives the missionary a word that is both firm and gentle; he is severe with regard to sin but gentle with regard to the sinner.**

1. Acts 2:22-40.

2. Acts 1:8.

3. Acts 2:37.

4. Jn 16:8.

5. Acts 3:17, 26.

The Revelation of the Holy Spirit in the Bible

The Holy Ghost is therefore the strength of the weak, the courage of the cowardly, the knowledge of the ignorant, the meekness of the rough. And he is rich in many more gifts. But do we know it well enough? I suggest that you quickly go through some moments in the Bible where he appears: by seeing what he does, we will know better who he is.

"In the beginning," says Genesis, "*the Spirit of God hovered over the waters.*"⁶ It was He who, in the morning of the world, gave it its beauty of a cosmos. Genesis also tells us that "*God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being*"⁷ **This breath of Life is his Holy Spirit, who is God and life-giving**, as we will sing later in the *Creed*: "*Deum et vivificantem.*"
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In the Old Testament we know that God spoke through the Prophets, as we will also sing in the *Creed*: "*qui locutus est per prophetas.* Now the prophets and all the holy books have **been inspired by the Holy Ghost**, which protects them from all mistakes about faith and gives them a power of conversion. **The Holy Spirit is the light that enlightens the intellect and guards the truth of revelation in the Church.**

In the Gospels, it is again the Holy Spirit who made Mary's virginal womb fertile: "*Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine*", we will sing again in the *Creed* later. "*She conceived of the Holy Spirit*" we repeat three times a day in the Angelus. We also know that he rested on Christ after his baptism, in the form of a dove. It is also through Him that Jesus casts out demons⁸. On Easter evening, Jesus breathes on the apostles, saying: "*Receive the Holy Spirit. Those whose sins you forgive, they will be forgiven; and those from whom you retain them, they will be withheld.*"⁹ In the confessional, **it is therefore by the breath of the Holy Spirit that the heaven of our soul is swept away from the clouds of sin.**

[*This may be the time to recall that a priest confesses at the back of the chapter*]

6. Gen 1:2.

7. Gen 2:7.

8. Mt 12:28.

9. Jn 20:22-23.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit is sent spectacularly upon the apostles at Pentecost: **thus every mission is an extension of this mission**, of this original sending. Saint Peter asks that we pray to him to appoint an apostle to replace Judas, **because the Holy Spirit must guide our important decisions** ; finally, it is he who is at work in the sacrament of baptism, confirmation, and the ordination of deacons and bishops, by the laying on of hands: **the Holy Spirit is the sanctifier, it is he who animates the life of the Church.**

But let us come to the point of the mystery: who is the Holy Spirit? What is his place in the Trinity? This is a great mystery: God is unique, but he is not solitary. From all eternity, God the Father begets his Son. From all eternity, He bends down in wonder over His Son, saying: "*You are my Son, today I have begotten you.*"¹⁰ What a wonder! And in return, from all eternity, the Son, "*begotten, not created*," looks at his Father and says, "*Abba, Father!* How much love the Father has for the Son! How much love the Son has for the Father! Well, this love is so perfect, so divine, that it is none other than God himself: this love is precisely the Holy Spirit. Yes! the mutual love of the Father and the Son is so powerful that it becomes "*personal*", the theologians tell us: from this mutual love proceeds the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity. In other words, the seal of God's love, the bond of love, is the Holy Spirit.

[*Here, one could leave a silence to meditate on this mystery so profound and so beautiful*
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The Holy Spirit in the Missionary's Life

We have glimpsed the mystery, let us return to the mission, the theme of our pilgrimage. How will the Holy Ghost animate the missionary?

The Holy Spirit and the Preaching

There is no mission without the Holy Spirit : for he is the *Inner Master*. Certainly, it is essential that the Christian speak of himself, with his own words, his talent, his arguments which he will have prepared and worked on seriously; but the Holy Spirit is necessary **for our words to be truly inspired** by this Inner Master. Without the Holy Spirit, our parish has no missionary efficacy. Without God, we preach in a vacuum.

10. Ps 2:7.

And the Holy Spirit is also necessary **in the soul of the listener**, for it is He, the Inner Master, who will whisper to the soul: "*It is true! You can believe it!*" It is this Inner Master who will give the listener the courage **to overcome his resistance**. Let us put ourselves in the shoes of the one to whom we proclaim the Gospel. Acknowledging that one has made a mistake can hurt one's pride. Welcoming the Truth may require a radical change of morals, may isolate oneself from family and friends. Sometimes, too, people reject the faith because they suffer from having lost a child, because Christians have given them lamentable examples, because they have been hurt by the attitude of the churchmen. ... Then, only the Holy Spirit can act in the heart of this struggling soul: "*Do not be afraid, I am your God, you are precious in my eyes and I love you*"¹¹ From then on, the listener will be able to find the courage and freedom to acquiesce.

The missionary must therefore invoke the Holy Spirit before speaking ; he must invoke the Holy Spirit when he listens to his interlocutor in order to listen to him in depth; he must invoke the Holy Spirit after the interview so that he may make him fruitful.

Frequenting Sacred Scripture

The missionary should also be in *frequent contact with the Bible*, since it contains not only the truths to be taught, but also their inspirer, their principal author, who is the Holy Spirit. Let us remember to call upon the Holy Spirit before opening the Bible.

Docility to the magisterium

The Holy Spirit assisted the sacred authors of the Bible: but he also assists the Church, whose mission is to faithfully guard this Revelation (the deposit of faith) and to transmit it. This is Jesus' promise to his apostles, and therefore to the popes and bishops their successors: "*Whoever hears you, listens to Me.*"¹² This is why the missionary, if he wants to let the Holy Spirit act in him and through him, must also be nourished by the teaching of the Church for twenty centuries : he will find it in the good catechisms that must be read and appropriated (cf. bibliography) and in the great encyclicals of the Church.

11. Is 43:4-5.

12. Lk 10:16.

Docility to the Spirit of Love

Through Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium, the intelligence of the missionary is ready to speak. All that remains is to prepare his heart. The missionary must be imbued with the love of souls. "*Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing*"¹³ Jesus prays for his executioners. We have seen it with Saint Francis de Sales: souls will let themselves be won over to the missionary all the more easily if they feel loved, respected, listened to. But we must love all souls, whereas we are naturally inclined to love only those who love us. This is why the missionary needs **an increase of love, broader, universal**, which only the Holy Spirit can give him. Every day, therefore, and especially on mission days, the missionary must spend a time in silence before God, so that the Spirit **may enlighten him with his light and expand his capacity to love**.

So, come Holy Spirit! On this day of Pentecost, make us enlightened, loving and courageous missionaries, for the love of the Holy Trinity and souls!

Quotes

The Holy Spirit is the architect of the Church. We depend on him and for our work to be effective, it must be done in collaboration with the Holy Spirit. We are the little apprentices, we pass the tools to him, we place the stones as he tells us...

Father Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus

The role of the Holy Spirit in the Church is not only preponderant, but indispensable. It was through the action of the Spirit on the morning of Pentecost that the Church, both Daughter and Bride of Christ and born of his sacrifice on the cross, reached adulthood, maturity and perfection. It is the Spirit who, communicating to her his inner strength, has enabled her to fulfill the mission in various forms received from her divine Founder. It is also the Spirit who, not content with giving the initial impulse, maintains the impetus and, maintaining his influence in the Church, assists her continuously, multiplying his interventions as diverse in their nature as in their mode. These interventions are so necessary

13. Lk 23:34.

that the fidelity and influence of the Church, and even better its existence and its continuity, depend on it, and no less on the holiness and supernatural success of each of the members of the Mystical Body. In short, the ecclesial mission of the Holy Spirit is so extensive and his action is exercised so deeply in the souls of the faithful that, obviously, the Catholic Church remains what it was originally: the Church of Pentecost. Led, like Jesus Himself, by the Holy Spirit, his divine Host, she is in truth the Church of the Spirit.

Rev. Fr. M.-H. Lavocat op, *L'Esprit de Vérité et d'Amour*, p. 270, Paris, 1968

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Dove of the Holy Spirit, stained glass window of the church of Saint-Yves (La Roche-Maurice)