



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 30 May 1979

1. Already in the first sentences of the Acts of the Apostles we read that Jesus, after his passion and resurrection, "presented himself to them alive... by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Then he announced that they would shortly be "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). And before the final parting, as the author of the Acts of the Apostles, St Luke, notes, in this case in his Gospel, he ordered them: "... stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (Lk 24:49). Therefore, after he had left the Apostles, by ascending to heaven, they "returned to Jerusalem" (Lk 24:52), where—as the Acts inform us again—they "devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14). Certainly the place of this common prayer, explicitly recommended by the Master, was the temple of Jerusalem as we read in the conclusion to the Gospel of St Luke (24:53). But it was also the Upper Room, as can be gathered from the Acts of the Apostles. The Lord Jesus had said to them: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Year after year, the Church in her liturgy celebrates the Lord's Ascension on the fortieth day after Easter.

Year after year, she spends also that period of ten days from Ascension to Pentecost in prayer to the Holy Spirit. In a certain sense the Church prepares, year after year, for the anniversary of her birth. She was born on the cross on Good Friday—as the Fathers teach; she revealed this birth of hers to the world on the day of Pentecost, when the Apostles were "clothed with power from on high" (Lk 24:49); when they were "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). "Ubi enim Ecclesia, ibi et Spiritus Dei; ubi Spiritus Dei, illic Ecclesia et omnis gratia: Spiritus autem veritas" (Where the Church is, there is also the Spirit of God; and where the spirit of God is, there is the Church and all grace: the Spirit is truth.) (St Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, II, 24, 1: PG 7, 966.)

2. Let us try to persevere in this rhythm of the Church. In the course of these days she invites us to take part in the novena to the Holy Spirit. It can be said that, among the various novenas, this is the most ancient one; it takes its origin, in a way, *from the institution by Christ the Lord*. It is clear that Jesus did not designate the prayers which we are to recite during these days. But, certainly, he urged the Apostles to spend these days in prayer in expectation of the descent of the Holy Spirit. This urging was valid not only then. It is still valid. And the period of ten days after the Lord's Ascension brings with it, every year, the same call of the Master. It also conceals within it the same *Mystery of Grace, connected with the rhythm of liturgical time*. It is necessary to take advantage of this time. In it, too, let us try to reflect deeply, in a particular way, and in a certain way to enter the Upper Room together with Mary and with the Apostles, preparing our souls to accept the Holy Spirit and his action in us. All this is of great importance for the interior maturity of our faith, of our Christian vocation. And it is also of great importance for the Church as a community: may every community in the Church and the whole Church, as a community of all communities, mature, year after year, by *means of the Gift of Pentecost*.

"The reinvigorating breath of the Spirit has come to awaken slumbering energies in the Church, to arouse sleeping charisms, to instil that sense of vitality and joy which at every period of history defines the Church herself as young and of topical interest, ready and happy to proclaim again her eternal message to the new times" (Paul VI, *Address to the Cardinals*, [21 December 1973]: AAS 66 (1974), 18).

This year, too, it is necessary to prepare for acceptance of this Gift. Let us try to take part in the prayer of the Church. "...Il est impossible d'entendre l'Esprit sans écouter ce qu'il dit à l'Eglise" ("...it is impossible to hear the Spirit without listening to what he says to the Church": H. de Lubac, *Méditations sur l'Eglise*, Paris 1973, Aubier 168).

Let us also pray alone. There is a special prayer which will ring out with due strength in the liturgy of Pentecost; we can, however, repeat it often, especially in the present period of expectation:

"Come, Holy Spirit / send us from heaven / a ray of your light. / Come, father of the poor, / come, giver of gifts, / come, light of hearts. / ...sweet guest of the soul / most sweet relief. / In *toil*, rest, / in heat, shelter / in tears, comfort. / ...*Wash* what is dirty, / *water* what is dry / *heal* what bleeds. / *Bend* what is rigid / *Warm* what is cold / straighten what is crooked."

We will come back one day, perhaps, to this magnificent Sequence and try to comment on it. Today let it be enough briefly to recall to memory some words and some sentences.

So let us address our prayers to the Holy Spirit in this period. Let us pray for *his gifts*. Let us pray for the transformation of our souls. Let us pray for fortitude in confessing the faith, for consistency of life with faith. Let us pray for the Church, so that she may carry out her mission in the Holy Spirit; so that the counsel and the Spirit of her Bridegroom and his God may accompany her (cf. S.

Bernard, *In Vigilia Nativitatis Domini, Sermo 3*, n. 1: PL 183, 941). Let us pray for the union of all Christians: for union in carrying out the same mission.

3. The description of this moment in which the Apostles, gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, received the Holy Spirit, is linked particularly with *the revelation of tongues*. We read: "And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:2-4).

The event, which took place in the Upper Room, did not pass unnoticed outside, among the people who were then in Jerusalem, and were—as we read—Jews of various nations. "...the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because *each one* heard them speaking in *his own language*" (Acts 2: 6). And those who were surprised in this way, hearing them speak their own language, are subsequently enumerated in the description of the Acts of the Apostles: "Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and Proselytes, Cretans and Arabians" (Acts 2:9-11). On the day of Pentecost all these people heard the Apostles, who were Galileans, speak in their own languages and proclaim the great works of God (cf. Acts 2:11).

And so, therefore, the day of Pentecost brings with it the *visible and perceptible proclamation* of the realization of Christ's mandate: "Go... and make disciples of all nations..." (Mt 28:19). By means of the revelation of languages, we already see, in a way, and hear the Church which, carrying out this mandate, is born and lives among the various nations of the earth.

In a few days, on the jubilee of St Stanislaus I will have the fortune to *go to Poland*, to my native land. I shall celebrate Pentecost, the feast of the descent of the Holy Spirit, just there. For this opportunity I have already, more than once, expressed my thanks to the Episcopate and to the Polish governmental authorities for the above invitation. Today I do so again.

In this perspective, I wish to express my particular joy because to that revelation of languages on the day of Pentecost *there have been added, during history, also the individual Slav languages* from Macedonia through Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia, Bohemia, Slovakia, Lusatia, in the West. And in the East: Rus (called the Ukraine today), Russia and Belorussia. I wish to express my very special joy because to the revelation of languages in the Upper Room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost *there has been added also my nation and its language: the Polish language*.

Since I am offered the opportunity of visiting my country on the solemnity of Pentecost, I wish to express my thanks because the Gospel has been announced for so many centuries in all these languages, and particularly in my national language. And at the same time I wish to serve this

important cause of our times: in order that "the great works of God" may continue to be proclaimed with faith and courage as the seed of hope and love which Christ grafted in us, by means of the Gift of Pentecost.

My visit to Poland, from 2 to 10 June next, will take place while events of great significance are being held in Italy and other European countries: in Italy, on 3 and 4 June, the elections for the national Parliament; on 10 June, in the nine countries of the European Community, the election, on a popular basis, of the first Parliament of the community itself.

Far away physically, I will feel near in heart to the tens and tens of millions of men and women who will be preparing to carry out a duty which is, at the same time, an act of service to the common good. I will pray to the Lord, and I am sure that you will pray with me, that each one will carry out this duty with a sense of responsibility and maturity, inspired by the deep dictates of his own conscience.

© Copyright 1979 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana