

## ENKINDLING THE HOLY SPIRIT

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

We have just celebrated the great day of the birth of the Church, Pentecost Sunday, and our hearts are filled with joy and wonder. It is so powerful to imagine the Apostles, other disciples, surrounding Mary there in the Upper Room. In those days, those hours leading up to the- to the arrival of the Holy Spirit, they were there in that Upper Room cowering, afraid even to answer the door. Suddenly, thanks to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they are unstoppable, outside preaching, filled with the boldness of the Spirit. Thanks to the impouring- the- the outpouring, the influence of the Holy Spirit, all the cowardice, the hesitation, becomes a thing of the past. The Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of strength, has made them firm, strong, and daring. And in the words of St. Josemaria, "The word of the Apostles resounds forcefully through the streets of Jerusalem." Our Lord had said to the disciples, "I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counselor, a Counselor to dwell with you forever." And the Lord has kept his promise.

During this time of prayer, that special- a special time of the birth of the Church, we can take advantage of St. Josemaria to guide us because his devotion to the Holy Spirit was so strong from the very beginning of Opus Dei. In a conversation with his spiritual director in 1932, that young, thirty-year old priest, Josemaria Escriva was told, make friends with the Holy Spirit. Don't speak to him; listen. On that occasion, St. Josemaria made the resolution to maintain, when possible, without interruption, a loving and docile friendship with the Holy Spirit. Let us ask him to grant us the deep and persevering conviction that the Holy Spirit is as active, as powerful as ever.

As he himself wrote in a very powerful meditation in 1969, "There is hardly a page in the Acts of the Apostles where we fail to read about the Holy Spirit, about the action by which he guides, directs and enlivens the work- and work- the life and work of the early Christian community. It is the Holy Spirit who inspires the preaching of St. Peter, who strengthens the faith of the disciples, who confirms with his presence, the calling of the Gentiles. Christian tradition has summarized the attitude we should adopt toward the Holy Spirit. In just one idea, docility. That means we should be aware of the work of the Holy Spirit all around us and in our own selves. We should recognize the gifts he distributes, the movements and institutions he inspires, the affections and decisions he provokes in our hearts."

These powerful words bring to mind something that took place many years ago, back in the mid 80s, at a conference center where a bishop was giving a conference to a gathering of diocesan priests. And at one point, he made this- he made the statement, "Is it possible that God is calling fewer people to the priesthood?" And he answered his own question. He said, "The Holy Spirit is as active as ever. What is of great interest is to foster among all of us docility, openness, to follow his lead." And here in this time of prayer for each one of us, we consider the Holy Spirit. I hereby give you carte blanche, I give you a blank check, to lead me wherever you want to take me- on a daily basis and in the bigger decisions I have to make in life. And that is because I am absolutely convinced that wherever you take me, that is where I will have the greatest efficacy.

Going back to those days leading up to Pentecost, to the original Pentecost, we can learn a lot from going with our imagination to the Upper Room. And putting ourselves in the shoes of those gathered around Our Lady, it is so easy to imagine that discouragement reigned in the hearts of each and every one of them, with the exception, of course, of Mary. After all, in those days that came between the Ascension Thursday and Pentecost, it's easy to imagine the Apostles deflated. They had just spent those glorious days with the risen Christ, days that they would never forget, and now he's gone. Well, as the hours went by after the Ascension, they were undoubtedly tempted to give too much importance to their own limitations and failings. Even worse, as they looked around the room, they could not help but wonder why Jesus had chosen such simple, unsophisticated people- unsophisticated people to continue his mission.

You might recall from a previous meditation together a very charming quip that someone came up with imagining Jesus after his Ascension, huddling with St. Michael the Archangel. Jesus says to Michael, "Look down there. See those- those people huddled there? They are going to continue my mission on the Earth." And St. Michael, as you recall, looked- kept looking, took off his glasses, made sure they were clean, and finally, after taking a deep gulp turned to Jesus and said, "Master, what is your Plan B?" And Jesus, of course, said, "There is no Plan B." It was just a fun quip, but the Apostles could have readily- could have said, exactly.

Well, it's interesting to bring up in the context of our time of prayer because the same kind of discouragement could cripple our own faith. It is all too easy to observe our surroundings with a vision that is too Earthbound. Going back again to that marvelous homily of St. Josemaria called The Great Unknown, he says, "The experience of our weakness and of our failings, the painful realization of the smallness and meanness of some who call themselves Christians, the apparent failure or aimlessness of some works of apostolate- all these things that bring home to us the reality of sin and human limitation- all those things can be a trial of our faith. They can test our faith. Temptation and doubt can lead us to ask, where are the strength and the power of God?"

St. Josemaria answers by saying "When that happens, we have to react by practicing the virtue of hope with greater purity and forcefulness and striving to be more faithful." It would be all too easy to fall into a kind of sterile lamentation, just focusing on the negative, focusing on the human foibles of those around us, starting with ourselves, hopefully starting with ourselves. That, of course, would in a very real way, be an

insult to the Holy Spirit. Our faith in the Holy Spirit must be complete. St. Josemaria goes on to say, "There cannot be faith in the Holy Spirit if there is not faith in Christ and his sacraments in his Church. We cannot act in accordance with our Christian faith, we cannot truly believe in the Holy Spirit, unless we love the Church and trust the Church. We cannot be a coherent Christian if we limit ourselves to pointing out the deficiencies and limitations of some who represent the Church. Judging the Church from the outside, as though- as though we were not her son or her daughter."

One preacher some years ago used a very beautiful image of this. He said, "Anybody can go to a beautiful, gothic Church, any Church with beautiful, genuine stained glass windows. Anybody can stand on the outside and say, Boy, are those- those windows dirty? No colors- no color. I just see a lot of dust, a lot of- I don't know- I don't understand why everyone gets excited about them. But then when you get inside and see the sun coming through those windows, well, that takes your breath away. Okay, now I understand, now I get it. It is only by entering into the Church, seeing ourselves as the children of the Church, and having above all trust in God's presence that we then see her beauty."

We finish this consideration with these words of St. Josemaria, "We cannot consider only the greater or less- lesser merits of certain churchmen or of some Christians. To do this would be to limit ourselves to the surface of things. What is most important in the Church is not how we humans react, but how God acts."

Given the beauty of the liturgy on Pentecost Sunday, we have to make reference to the sequence. Right before the Gospel on Pentecost Sunday, there is a sublime source of wisdom for our dealings with the Holy Spirit. It is the sequence that begins, "Come, Holy Spirit, come." That sequence is worth turning to frequently because those remarkable- remarkable verses can provide great joy and peace: "You, of comforters the best; you, the soul's most welcome guest; Sweet refreshment here below; In our labor, rest most sweet; Grateful coolness in the heat; solace in the midst of woe."

At- by this point, each of us has undoubtedly memorized these lines. They're so- they're so lyrical, so beautiful, and so profound. And so that these words will come to our lips spontaneously in so many different situations. "In our labor, rest most sweet; grateful coolness in the heat; solace in the midst of woe." That sequence can also illuminate so many difficult moments in life. Each of us has been confronted with situations that seem to us as without solution. For example, it can happen to ourselves, or perhaps a friend confides in us by saying, I just cannot get over- I cannot find the way to forgive so-and-so. I just can't forget it, it keeps haunting me. Well, in that kind of a situation, we've had the experience of thinking, what can I say? Try, try, try again. It just doesn't work. And gradually it dawns on us- there really is no other way other than placing that difficulty, that wounded heart, in the hands of the Holy Spirit. And so, that verse from the sequence is perfect: "Heal our wounds, our strength renew; on our dryness, pour your dew." You, Holy Spirit, you are the one capable of healing my wounds- the wounds of my friend, my dear one- because I can't. You're the one capable of renewing my strength.

How many times have we experienced the very obvious assistance of the third person of the Blessed Trinity? And so, we turn to those other verses of the sequence that put words to that sentiment of great gratitude, of great awareness, that without the Holy Spirit, that nothing- there's nothing worth doing: "Where you are not, man has naught; nothing good in deed or thought, nothing free from taint of ill." This, Holy Spirit, is why we need you so badly because without you we can't pray, we can't have a supernatural thought. Without you, we have nothing. "Nothing good in deed or thought, nothing free from taint of ill."

There are times in our own dealings with our friends, our personal apostolate, when our desire to help them has seemingly run up against a brick wall. We pray for them. We give them advice. We're a terrific friend, and yet we see that they are heading in the wrong direction, that they have become stubborn. Well, that is a time to turn to the Holy Spirit and say, "Bend the stubborn heart and will; melt the frozen, warm the chill; guide the steps that go astray." During these days of- of Pentecost, Sunday and the days afterwards, one of wonderful ways for us to help our friends to pray very directly to the Holy Spirit to say, do this, bend that stubborn heart and will; melt the frozen, warm that friend of mine up, warm the chill; guide those steps that are going astray.

A very powerful way to end our time of prayer would be to return once again to the Upper Room on the day of the Resurrection because we have to contemplate God's great gift to us on that day. We read, "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them. Whose sins you retain, they are retained.'" It's very significant that we read in Sacred Scripture that Jesus breathed on them. We say that- we see that very same action at the moment when God created our first parents. It's the divine way of saying to us, pay great attention because this is a key moment. He breathed on them and then said, receive the Holy Spirit. And then he gave us a great gift of the sacrament of penance: "Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them. Whose sins you are- you retain, they are retained."

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations that you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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