



SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST

HOLY MASS WITH THE ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

Saint Peter's Square

Sunday, 19 May 2013

Video

Photo Gallery

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today we contemplate and re-live in the liturgy the outpouring of the Holy Spirit sent by the risen Christ upon his Church; an event of grace which filled the Upper Room in Jerusalem and then spread throughout the world.

But what happened on that day, so distant from us and yet so close as to touch the very depths of our hearts? Luke gives us the answer in the passage of the *Acts of the Apostles* which we have heard (2:1-11). The evangelist brings us back to Jerusalem, to the Upper Room where the apostles were gathered. The first element which draws our attention is the sound which suddenly came from heaven “like the rush of a violent wind”, and filled the house; then the “tongues as of fire” which divided and came to rest on each of the apostles. Sound and tongues of fire: these are clear, concrete signs which touch the apostles not only from without but also within: deep in their minds and hearts. As a result, “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit”, who unleashed his irresistible power with amazing consequences: they all “began to speak in different languages, as the Spirit gave them ability”. A completely unexpected scene opens up before our eyes: a great crowd gathers,

astonished because each one heard the apostles speaking in his own language. They all experience something new, something which had never happened before: "We hear them, each of us, speaking our own language". And what is it that they are they speaking about? "God's deeds of power".

In the light of this passage from *Acts*, I would like to reflect on three words linked to the working of the Holy Spirit: newness, harmony and mission.

1. *Newness* always makes us a bit fearful, because we feel more secure if we have everything under control, if we are the ones who build, programme and plan our lives in accordance with our own ideas, our own comfort, our own preferences. This is also the case when it comes to God. Often we follow him, we accept him, but only up to a certain point. It is hard to abandon ourselves to him with complete trust, allowing the Holy Spirit to be the soul and guide of our lives in our every decision. We fear that God may force us to strike out on new paths and leave behind our all too narrow, closed and selfish horizons in order to become open to his own. Yet throughout the history of salvation, whenever God reveals himself, he brings newness - God always brings newness -, and demands our complete trust: Noah, mocked by all, builds an ark and is saved; Abram leaves his land with only a promise in hand; Moses stands up to the might of Pharaoh and leads his people to freedom; the apostles, huddled fearfully in the Upper Room, go forth with courage to proclaim the Gospel. This is not a question of novelty for novelty's sake, the search for something new to relieve our boredom, as is so often the case in our own day. The newness which God brings into our life is something that actually brings fulfilment, that gives true joy, true serenity, because God loves us and desires only our good. Let us ask ourselves today: Are we open to "God's surprises"? Or are we closed and fearful before the newness of the Holy Spirit? Do we have the courage to strike out along the new paths which God's newness sets before us, or do we resist, barricaded in transient structures which have lost their capacity for openness to what is new? We would do well to ask ourselves these questions all through the day.

2. A second thought: the Holy Spirit would appear to create disorder in the Church, since he brings the diversity of charisms and gifts; yet all this, by his working, is a great source of wealth, for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity, which does not mean uniformity, but which leads everything back to *harmony*. In the Church, it is the Holy Spirit who creates harmony. One of Fathers of the Church has an expression which I love: the Holy Spirit himself is harmony – "*Ipse harmonia est*". He is indeed harmony. Only the Spirit can awaken diversity, plurality and multiplicity, while at the same time building unity. Here too, when we are the ones who try to create diversity and close ourselves up in what makes us different and other, we bring division. When we are the ones who want to build unity in accordance with our human plans, we end up creating uniformity, standardization. But if instead we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit, richness, variety and diversity never become a source of conflict, because he impels us to experience variety within the communion of the Church. Journeying together in the Church, under the guidance of her pastors who possess a special charism and ministry, is a sign of the working of the Holy Spirit. Having a sense of the Church is something fundamental for every Christian, every community and every movement. It is the Church which brings Christ to me, and me to Christ; parallel journeys are very dangerous! When we venture beyond (*proagon*) the Church's teaching and community – the Apostle John tells us in his Second Letter - and do not remain in them, we are not one with the God of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 *Jn* v. 9). So let us ask ourselves: Am I open to the harmony of the Holy Spirit, overcoming every form of exclusivity? Do I let myself be guided by him, living in the Church and with the Church?

3. A final point. The older theologians used to say that the soul is a kind of sailboat, the Holy Spirit is the wind which fills its sails and drives it forward, and the gusts of wind are the gifts of the Spirit. Lacking his impulse and his grace, we do not go forward. The Holy Spirit draws us into the mystery of the living God and saves us from the threat of a Church which is gnostic and self-referential, closed in on herself; he impels us to open the doors and go forth to proclaim and bear witness to the good news of the Gospel, to communicate the joy of faith, the encounter with Christ. The Holy Spirit is the soul of *mission*. The events

that took place in Jerusalem almost two thousand years ago are not something far removed from us; they are events which affect us and become a lived experience in each of us. The Pentecost of the Upper Room in Jerusalem is the beginning, a beginning which endures. The Holy Spirit is the supreme gift of the risen Christ to his apostles, yet he wants that gift to reach everyone. As we heard in the Gospel, Jesus says: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to remain with you forever" (*Jn 14:16*). It is the Paraclete Spirit, the "Comforter", who grants us the courage to take to the streets of the world, bringing the Gospel! The Holy Spirit makes us look to the horizon and drive us to the very outskirts of existence in order to proclaim life in Jesus Christ. Let us ask ourselves: do we tend to stay closed in on ourselves, on our group, or do we let the Holy Spirit open us to mission? Today let us remember these three words: newness, harmony and mission.

Today's liturgy is a great prayer which the Church, in union with Jesus, raises up to the Father, asking him to renew the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. May each of us, and every group and movement, in the harmony of the Church, cry out to the Father and implore this gift. Today too, as at her origins, the Church, in union with Mary, cries out: "*Veni, Sancte Spiritus!* Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love!" Amen.