JMJ

PENTECOST – B – 2021

In paintings of the scene of Pentecost, the Apostles are depicted as having a little flame on the tops of their heads. Those are the “tongues as of fire” that St. Luke says came to rest on each one of them. They look a little like burning candles: they were literally on fire.

And the fire of the Holy Spirit, who had come down on them, did two things. It filled them with a desire to share the good news with others, which they immediately did; but it also prepared them for that task by burning away some of the dross of their sins.

There are two lists in the Scriptures this Sunday. One of them is the list of the many different nationalities that were gathered in Jerusalem that day; that was given to us in the first reading. And the other is the long list of the “works of the flesh,” given to us in second reading. In reading those two lists, I noticed something: they’re both fifteen-items long. Just a coincidence, maybe. But it got me to thinking:

Those works of the flesh, if they had continued in the lives of the Apostles, would have been a great hindrance to the proclamation of the Gospel if the fire of the Holy Spirit hadn’t burned them away.

What are those works of the flesh? They are immorality, impurity, lust, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like.

Certainly the Apostles weren’t guilty of all fifteen of those things; but before Pentecost, they were guilty of a few of them. They were guilty of rivalry, jealousy, acts of selfishness, and occasions of envy. But God in His providence healed them. He did this through the three years they spent in His company and through His death on the cross; but most especially He did this when He appeared to them on Easter Sunday night: when He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The fire of the Holy Spirit first heals and then gives power.

We see it repeated again at Pentecost. The disciples were gathered in prayer, about one hundred and twenty of them, with the Apostles among them, and our Blessed Mother. And the fire of the Holy Spirit settled upon the head of each one – to heal, if healing were needed, and to strengthen.

The Apostles then left that Upper Room and began to speak publicly about the marvels of God; to people who spoke at least fifteen other languages. And they all understood them!

Now, what has all this got to do with us?

Well, almost all of us here have been baptized, and most of us have been confirmed; which means that we’ve received that same Holy Spirit. So if we feel a little timid about sharing our faith with others, maybe we’ll have to *fan* that flame a little. In a lot of us that flame is like a little pilot light: it’s there and it’s burning, but it doesn’t give much light or warmth.

But the world is very cold and dark, and it very much needs the witness of Catholics who know Jesus Christ and have been given the gift of His Holy Spirit; Catholics who’ve allowed prayer and the grace of the sacraments to heal them of those tendencies that would hinder or cripple their witness. Things like timidity, cowardice, complacency, self-centeredness and lack of concern for others’ salvation. We need to be healed, too, of any sins that give serious scandal, things that would give others a reason to reject what we say because they’d think we’re just a bunch of hypocrites.

So, on this feast of Pentecost, let’s ask the Holy Spirit to heal our hearts of anything that blocks the flow of His grace in our lives, of anything that would keep us from being clear and unambiguous heralds of His good news and holy will.

But to whom should we speak? To whom should we go?

The Apostles on that first Pentecost didn’t have to travel very far. They just started to talk to the people they met; to Parthians and Medes and Elamites and all the others of those fifteen language groups. So, I tried to think of fifteen kinds of people that *we* might encounter who are very close by. Here’s my list: our wives, our husbands, our children (each one of those groups often speaks a different “language”), also our extended family, and our boyfriends, girlfriends, coworkers, school mates, teachers, team mates, pew mates, our ushers, restaurant workers (that’s thirteen), and also priests and deacons (they might need a little evangelization, too). In fact, everyone we come across can use a little evangelization; each one, perhaps, in some unique way. And every one of them will understand the language of God’s charity.

Show them that you’ve met the risen Lord Jesus Christ and that it’s made a difference – and that He’s truly given *you* a share of His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Pentecost.