

Solemnity of Pentecost (A)

Those in our modern culture who identify themselves as secularists, agnostics or atheists often claim that religion is a childish fantasy, that science has undermined all of its claims, and that it is violent and dangerous. They also claim that they do not need religion and are perfectly happy as they are. This world gives me all that I require, they say. What fascinates me is that as happy as they are and having all they need from this world; why do so many of them spend so much time and energy engaging in the discussion of religion?

St. Augustine was dead right when said: *Lord, you have made us for Yourself; therefore our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.* Everybody, believer and non-believer alike, knows in his bones that this is true. And I have wagered my whole life on it.

The proof of this is that nothing in this world: success, money, power, or pleasure, ever truly satisfies the human heart completely. There is still a longing for something more. Even Donald Trump and Bill Gates would admit to this in their more honest moments.

It is a fact that we want, with all our hearts, something that this world simply cannot offer us. We eventually come to realize that so much of what we pursue in this life ultimately disappoints us in the end.

Those of us who embrace our faith wholeheartedly know that the human heart is only fulfilled by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. We want the very life of God within us. We want the vitality and energy of God. And this is our focus today on this great feast of Pentecost, the feast of the Holy Spirit.

It is precisely what Jesus is talking about in the 7th Chapter of John's gospel from the Vigil Mass for today. When at the climax of the great feast of Tabernacles, Jesus stands in the temple precincts and says: *Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink.* Keeping this image in mind, consider that the fact that we can live quite a while without food, especially if we have a little fat on our bones. But, without water, we would die in very short order. That's how desperately we need water.

Water is an absolute prerequisite for life and we sense this truth precisely when we are thirsty. Hunger, while also unpleasant, is not quite the same as being thirsty. There is something particularly awful about thirst, something desperate and oppressing that goes beyond the level of hunger. It is our body's way of signaling that it needs something essential and it needs it NOW.

This is why Jesus speaks of thirst. We recall the Psalmist's words: *O God, You are my God, for whom I thirst, like a dry weary land without water.* Our need for God is desperate and oppressing like the worst thirst we have ever experienced and nothing in **this** world could ever satisfy such a thirst as this.

Jesus is speaking to a craving in the human heart so profound; it seeks meaning, purpose, and a connection to something, to someone beyond itself.

In our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear that Jews have gathered from all over the world in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. It was a Jewish feast before it became a Christian feast. They all hear the same message as the disciples preach. It is the message that everybody is thirsty for. At that miracle of Pentecost everyone hears the disciples speaking in his own language, signally the universality of this thirst of which I am speaking. Christian and non-Christian, believers and non-believers, Easterners and Westerners, everyone wants to hear this message.

As they whistle in the dark, the secularists and atheist are tragically set adrift in a spiritual desert; that dry weary land without water. This is why our culture and our Church itself need to be evangelized and re-evangelized. People all over the planet are dying of thirst. What the Church offers is the water of the Holy Spirit. ***Come to me, Jesus says, and drink.***

And how do we get the Holy Spirit? There is a hint in the second reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Paul tells us: ***No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*** There is a very tight correlation between having the Holy Spirit and declaring the Lordship of Jesus. And what does it mean to declare the Lordship of Jesus? It means to submit to His direction in every aspect of your life: to think as He thought; to act as He acted; to desire as He desired; to pray as He prayed; to love as He loved. If Jesus is the Lord of my life, if He is the Dominus in Latin, then He must dominate every aspect of my existence.

It doesn't mean I pay attention to Him for a few minutes once a week. It doesn't mean I pay Him lip service. It doesn't mean I merely check the box: I'm a Christian, I am a Catholic. It means that He has taken possession of my whole life.

Submission to His Lordship will unleash the Holy Spirit in you. It is when you make Jesus the Lord of your life that the Holy Spirit becomes operative in you.

Remember, as Jesus dies on the cross, He breathes his last and then hands over the Spirit—a beautiful image indeed. As Jesus dies, He expires, breathing His last breath, He hands over His Spirit. Spirit, throughout Scripture means breath, wind, and power. We recall also that the Resurrected Jesus breathed on His disciples and He said: ***Receive the Holy Spirit.***

As we celebrate this great feast of Pentecost let us pray for a renewal of the power, strength, vigor, energy, life, and light of the Holy Spirit. But first, my brothers and sister, you must make Jesus and only Him, the Lord of your whole life. You must daily draw near to Him and learn how to think as He thought, pray as He prayed, and love as He loved; then and only then will the Holy Spirit dwell within you. Amen.