

“Come Holy Spirit, come! Fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.”

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

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Pentecost

St. Mary’s Cathedral, Fargo

“Come Holy Spirit, come! Fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.” Today is Pentecost, the fiftieth day since Easter Sunday, and Pentecost is often called the “birthday” of the Church. Easter is the feast of triumph, Christ’s triumph over death, and the guarantee of our final triumph and union with him in eternal life. But Pentecost crowns the work of Christ among us. The Holy Spirit comes to abide with his people, with the Church, and gives life to all of us as we carry on our Christian journey.

We all know how timid and fearful the apostles were. They spent much time with Jesus, but didn’t completely get what he tried to get across to them. They ran away out of fear when Jesus was arrested. And even after the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus, they were unsure of what would happen and what they were supposed to do. But on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit rushed upon them, just as Jesus had promised, and they were completely changed. They went out into the streets of Jerusalem and preached about Jesus openly, almost with reckless abandon. Their fear evaporated and they were filled with confidence as they proclaimed the Good News about Christ. There was a boldness in their witness, and joy too. They were eager to get out there and let the world know about Jesus, and the Spirit gave them the courage and wisdom they needed to do it.

The Holy Spirit is often called the Sanctifier, the one who makes us holy. In the Gospel, Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon his apostles, and in doing so he gave the power of forgiveness to his Church. Sin is what separates us from God, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be forgiven and restored to grace. By the Holy Spirit, we can become holy, which simply means being in a right relationship with God, Christ-like, formed in the image of Jesus our Lord.

And lest we forget, the Holy Spirit is always with us, at work in our hearts and in the Church. Perhaps the most vivid manifestations of the Spirit are through the sacraments. When we are baptized, we received the Holy Spirit for the first time and became sharers in the divine life of God. By the seal of Baptism, we are made adopted children of God, and heirs to the gifts of the Spirit that Jesus gives to his Church. But it’s through Confirmation that we share most fully in the life of the Holy Spirit. We are anointed with chrism, just as the apostles were anointed in the signs of wind and fire, and by this anointing we share even more powerfully in the gifts of the Spirit. The Spirit literally confirms us in Christ, confirms us for the Christian life and for the mission that Jesus gave to his Church. We are made holy and pure in the Spirit so that we can live the life of heaven that has been prepared for all God’s holy ones.

The fact is that every act of grace in our lives is a movement of the Holy Spirit. When we repent of our sins, it is the Spirit who moves us to repentance. When we are forgiven our sins

through Reconciliation, it is the Spirit who purifies our hearts. When we feel moved to pray, it is the Spirit who quietly invites us and places a longing for God in our hearts. When we are moved to charity toward others, it is the Spirit who plants that seed of love and gives us the push we need to act on it. When we have one of those “ahah” moments, a moment of deeper insight or understanding in faith, the Spirit has shed a ray of light into our minds and hearts, and has allowed us to enter more deeply into the eternal truth of God. And when we are ready to stand up for our faith, even to make a sacrifice and pay a steep price as the apostles did, it’s the Spirit who supplies us with the fortitude, the strength to stand with Jesus, or even to lay down our life for him.

If we want a proof of the Spirit among us, we have only to look at the history of the Church. Starting with the apostles themselves, it’s a story of human frailty and sinfulness, but it’s also a story of God’s unfailing mercy and grace. If it were up to us sinners, the Church would have fallen apart a long time ago. But the Holy Spirit is constantly at work in the Church, and through one crisis after another, the Church survives. Even now, when the faith can seem weak and too many have drifted away, the Holy Spirit is still with us, still touching the hearts of people everywhere, still quietly attracting people to the goodness of Jesus. Many powerful oppressors have threatened and tried to destroy the Church, but failed. Different philosophies have denigrated the faith and declared it to be irrelevant, but it’s still here. And in our time, more subtle forces, like secularism, materialism, and relativism have attempted to crowd out the truth of God. But the Spirit cannot be crowded out. Like the wind, like the warmth of fire, he works his way into our hearts, and opens us up to the grace of Jesus. Every year we hear stories of conversion from people who seemed to be entirely closed to God. But the Holy Spirit can gently overcome every barrier and break through every wall. There is no limit to the miracles the Holy Spirit is capable of.

One of the fruits of the Spirit is peace, and we certainly need peace in these turbulent days. Where there is discord and injustice and anger, the Spirit can bring harmony, justice, and peace. We should ask the Spirit to come upon us and all in our community and our nation to banish violence of any kind and bring a spirit of peace to every heart. Where there is violence, may the Holy Spirit bring peace.

As we live out our Christian faith every day, we need to pray for the grace of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is just as alive in the Church today as on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is just as present to us today as he was to the Apostles. We have only to ask for the grace of the Spirit, and his gifts will be ours. Let us pray every day: “Come, Holy Spirit, come fill my heart and kindle in me the fire of your love.” And we can be certain, the Holy Spirit will come.