



The Holy See

PAPAL MASS ON THE SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Vatican Basilica
Sunday, 12 June 2011*

[\(Video\)](#)

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today we are celebrating the great [Solemnity of Pentecost](#). If, in a certain sense, all the liturgical solemnities of the Church are important, Pentecost is uniquely so. This is because, having reached the 50th day, it marks the fulfilment of the event of the passover, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus through the gift of the Spirit of the Risen One. In the past few days the Church has prepared us for Pentecost with her prayer, with her repeated and intense invocation to God to obtain a fresh outpouring upon us of the Holy Spirit. The Church has thus relived all that happened at her origins, when the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room of Jerusalem “with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the Mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts 1:14).

They were gathered in humble and trusting expectation that the Father’s promise, announced to them by Jesus, would be fulfilled: “Before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit... you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:5,8).

In the liturgy of Pentecost Psalm 104[103], which we have heard, corresponds with the account in the Acts of the Apostles of the birth of the Church (cf. Acts 2:1-11): a hymn of praise of the whole creation which exalts the Creator Spirit who has made all things with wisdom: “O Lord, how

manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.... May the glory of the Lord endure for ever, may the Lord rejoice in his works” (Ps 104[103]:24, 31). This is what the Church wants to tell us: the Spirit Creator of all things and the Holy Spirit whom the Lord caused to come down from the Father upon the community of the disciples are one and the same. Creation and redemption belong to each other and constitute, in depth, one mystery of love and of salvation. The Holy Spirit is first and foremost a Creator Spirit, hence Pentecost is also a feast of creation. For us Christians, the world is the fruit of an act of love by God who has made all things and in which he rejoices because it is “good”, it is “very good”, as the creation narrative tells us (cf. Gen 1:1-31). Consequently God is not totally Other, unnameable and obscure. God reveals himself, he has a face. God is reason, God is will, God is love, God is beauty. Faith in the Creator Spirit and faith in the Spirit whom the Risen Christ gave to the Apostles and gives to each one of us are therefore inseparably united.

Today’s Second Reading and Gospel show us this connection. The Holy Spirit is the One who makes us recognize the Lord in Christ and prompts us to speak the profession of the Church’s faith: “Jesus is Lord” (cf. 1 Cor 12:3b). “Lord” is the title attributed to God in the Old Testament, a title that in the interpretation of the Bible replaced his unpronounceable name. The *Creed* of the Church is nothing other than the development of what we say with this simple affirmation: “Jesus is Lord”. Concerning this profession of faith St Paul tells us that it is precisely a matter of the word and work of the Spirit. If we want to be in the Spirit, we must adhere to this *Creed*. By making it our own, by accepting it as our word we gain access to the work of the Holy Spirit. The words “Jesus is Lord” can be interpreted in two ways. They mean: Jesus is God, and, at the same time: God is Jesus. The Holy Spirit illuminates this reciprocity: Jesus has divine dignity and God has the human face of Jesus. God shows himself in Jesus and by doing so gives us the truth about ourselves. Letting ourselves be enlightened by this word in the depths of our inmost being is the event of Pentecost. In reciting the *Creed* we enter into the mystery of the first Pentecost: a radical transformation results from the tumult of Babel, from those voices yelling at each other: multiplicity becomes a multi-faceted unity, understanding grows from the unifying power of the Truth. In the *Creed* — which unites us from all the corners of the earth and which, through the Holy Spirit, ensures that we understand each other even in the diversity of languages — the new community of God’s Church is formed through faith, hope and love.

The Gospel passage then offers us a marvellous image to clarify the connection between Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Father: the Holy Spirit is portrayed as the breath of the Risen Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 20:22). Here the Evangelist John takes up an image of the creation narrative, where it says that God breathed into the nostrils of man the breath of life (cf. Gen 2:7). The breath of God is life. Now, the Lord breathes into our soul the new breath of life, the Holy Spirit, his most intimate essence, and in this way welcomes us into God’s family. With Baptism and Confirmation this gift was given to us specifically, and with the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance it is continuously repeated: the Lord breathes a breath of life into our soul. All the sacraments, each in its own way, communicate divine life to human beings, thanks to the Holy Spirit who works within

them.

In today's liturgy we perceive another connection. The Holy Spirit is Creator, he is at the same time the Spirit of Jesus Christ, but in such a way that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God. And in the light of the First Reading we may add: the Holy Spirit gives life to the Church. She is not born from the human will, from man's reflection, from his ability or from his organizational capacity, if this were so she would have ceased to exist long ago, as happens with all that is human. Instead the Church is the body of Christ, enlivened by the Holy Spirit. The images of wind and fire, used by St Luke to portray the coming of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:2-3), evoke Sinai, where God revealed himself to the People of Israel and granted it his Covenant. "Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke", we read in the Book of Exodus, "because the Lord descended upon it in fire" (19:18). Indeed Israel celebrated the 50th day after the Passover, after the commemoration of the flight from Egypt, as the feast of Sinai, the feast of the Covenant. When St Luke speaks of tongues of fire to represent the Holy Spirit, this Old Covenant is called to mind, established on the basis of the Law received by Israel on Sinai. Thus the event of Pentecost is represented as a new Sinai, as the gift of a new Covenant in which the Covenant with Israel was extended to all the peoples of the earth, in which all the barriers fall from the old Law and its heart appears holier and more unchangeable; in other words as love, which the Holy Spirit himself communicates and spreads, a love that embraces all things. At the same time the Law is expanded, it is opened, even though it becomes simpler: it is the New Covenant which the Spirit "writes" in the hearts of all who believe in Christ. The extension of the Covenant to all the peoples of the earth is represented by St Luke with a list of peoples, that is considerably long for that epoch (cf. Acts 2:9-11). With this we are told something most important: that the Church was catholic from the very outset, that her universality is not the result of the successive inclusion of various communities. Indeed, from the first moment the Holy Spirit created her as the Church of all peoples; she embraces the whole world, surmounts all distinctions of race, class and nation; tears down all barriers and brings people together in the profession of the triune God. Since the beginning the Church has been one, catholic and apostolic: this is her true nature and must be recognized as such. She is not holy because of her members' ability but because God himself, with his Spirit, never ceases to create her, purify her and sanctify her.

Lastly, today's Gospel presents these beautiful words to us: "the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (Jn 20:20). These words are profoundly human. The Friend lost is present once again and those who were formerly distraught rejoice. But it says far more. For the lost Friend did not come from just anywhere but from the night of death; and he passed through it! He is not just anyone; indeed he is the Friend and at the same time the One who is the Truth that gives life to men and women; and what he gives is not just any kind of joy but joy itself, a gift of the Holy Spirit. Yes, it is beautiful to live because I am loved and it is the Truth who loves me. The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Today, at Pentecost, these words are also addressed to us, because in faith we can see him. In faith he comes among us and to us too he shows his hands and his side and we are glad. Therefore let us pray: Lord, show yourself! Make us the gift of your

presence and we shall have the most beautiful gift: your joy. Amen!

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