

PENTECOST (2009)

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

31 May 2009

Jesus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, redeemed mankind from the sin of Adam when He suffered, died and then rose from the dead in His human nature. But His act of redemption wasn't fully completed until He ascended into heaven to assume His place at the right hand of the Father as a high priest entering the sanctuary to make intercession for us to the Father. But before He left, He promised the apostles that He would not leave them as orphans. He promised to send the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, who would reveal to them all things and guide them in the ways of faith. He had completed **His** mission and the Holy Spirit could not come and begin His until Jesus had been glorified and taken from their sight.

Today's great solemnity commemorates that day, when the Father and the Son together in heaven sent the Holy Spirit to sanctify the world through His presence among men. Although the Church was born mystically from the opened side of Christ on the cross, today is considered the birthday of the Church because it was on this day two thousand years ago that the visible Church sprang into being. As the apostles were gathered together praying in the Upper Room, the people, who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Jewish feast of Weeks, a religious festival of thanksgiving for the harvest, heard the strong driving wind that marked the Spirit's arrival. Then, as He descended upon the apostles in tongues of fire, He gave them the courage to go out and boldly proclaim the Good News to the people that had gathered outside in a large crowd.

The Jews named this harvest festival "Pentecost" from the Greek word meaning "the fiftieth." Later, the Church retained that same name because this day was the fiftieth day after Easter. Early Christians called the entire fifty-day period from Easter to this day, "Pentecost." It was a time when they didn't fast because it was a festive time of joy. Some countries named this feast after their ancient custom of decorating homes and churches with flowers and branches, such as in Poland where Pentecost is called *Zielone Świątki*—"The Green Holidays."

But in so many places, Pentecost has, unfortunately, become a day that differs from other Sundays only by the color of the vestments and readings. It seems like nothing more than a commemoration of an event in the history of the Church, not something really alive in the minds of most Catholics. It doesn't carry the great importance that it once did, when Pentecost was celebrated with great solemnity and fanfare. In the Middle Ages, the Feast of Pentecost was known by the beautiful name of "The Pasch of Roses" because in the color and fragrance of this noble flower they saw symbols of the Tongues of Fire, which rested upon the heads of the apostles.¹ And this is also why we wear red vestments.

In some churches, they threw down flowers or flower petals on the people from balconies or openings in the ceiling to symbolize the Tongues of Fire that descended upon the apostles. Perhaps, the most spectacular example of this is the Pantheon in Rome, which after two thousand years still boasts one of the largest and most perfect domed spaces in the world. Every year, at the end of the solemn Mass of Pentecost, men throw

down buckets of red rose petals upon the people through the opening in the center of the dome. The petals float down gently, in and out of the single ray of sun that shines through that opening, filling the air like so many flames of fire.

Because Pentecost is the final act of the redemptive mission for which Christ was sent to us, this feast has, therefore, always held a place of great prominence in the Church's liturgy. Just like Easter, it had a vigil Mass when Baptism was solemnly administered to new converts. Just like Easter, it had an Octave during which this important feast was celebrated for a full eight days.

The season of the year, in which the Holy Spirit comes to take possession of His earthly kingdom, is also rich with symbolism. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, appeared in Bethlehem in the depth of winter as the Sun of Justice, just beginning to rise over the horizon. After humbly beginning his ascent to glory, He then triumphed over death by rising from the tomb at the same time that all of the earth was rising to life from the sleep of winter. And as the sun was rising day by day higher in the sky, the Sun of Righteousness rose into the heavens to take up His seat in glory at the right hand of the Father.

It was from the heights of their heavenly throne that the Father and the Son in their brilliant radiance sent their Holy Spirit in tongues of fire like rays emanating from the blazing sun. So, He appropriately comes into the world when summer is bursting out around us, when the bright rays of the summer sun bedeck the earth with flowers. "The Spirit of the Father and the Son came in the season that harmonizes with his own divine characteristic for He is a consuming Fire."² "From this day forward, he inundates the whole earth with his Fire, he gives spiritual life to all, he makes his influence felt in every place."³

"If there be no obstacle on our parts, he will take possession of our souls. Let us acknowledge to him the need we have of his visit; let us [beseech] him to take up his new abode within us, now and for ever. Showing him how our souls are sealed with himself, by the indelible characters of Baptism and Confirmation, let us beseech him to defend his own work. We are his own possession; may he bestow upon us the graces we are now going to pray for!"⁴ "He is the consuming Fire ... Let us welcome the life giving heat of the Holy [Spirit] and earnestly beseech him that it may ever abide within us."⁵

¹ Guéranger, R.R. Dom Prosper, *The Liturgical Year*, Paschal Time, volume III, (Stanbrook Abbey: Worcester, 1890) 294.

² Ibid, 293.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, 295.

⁵ Ibid, 293.