

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF
THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
WASHINGTON, DC
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My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we conclude the Easter Season, as the Apostolic Nuncio, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis, assuring you of his spiritual closeness and paternal affection. I greet all those joining by television, radio and live streaming. Today, we celebrate that great outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, gathered in prayer with Mary, the Mother of the Lord. In many parts of the country, public worship resumed after the onset of the pandemic; although still limited by the pandemic, we give thanks to God for all that He has accomplished in the Church and in the world.

Today's Gospel is the "Pentecost Event" in the Gospel of John, set on the evening of the Resurrection. The disciples were trapped, locked behind closed doors, in fear. They were isolated and alone, ashamed of their cowardice and abandonment of Jesus during His Passion, but the Risen Lord passed through those barriers, showing them His wounds of love, and the disciples rejoiced to see the Lord. They recognized that He who had been crucified was alive. The power of the Resurrection, which we have celebrated throughout the Easter Season, was truly transformative. Their sadness and fear were changed to joy!

Then, Jesus wished them peace, not once by twice and said: "*As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit.*" Jesus breathed His Spirit upon them, symbolically breathing new life into them. That is what the Lord offers: fullness of life.

His breathing on them recalls Genesis 2:7, when God breathed the breath of life into man, making him a living being. It hearkens to the prophecy of the dry bones in Ezekiel (37:9), whereby the Spirit restores life, putting flesh on the dry bones. It reminds us of the restoration of life to the Shunammite woman's son by Elisha (2 Kings 4:32-37), who breathed on the child. Jesus' breathing the Spirit on the Apostles represents the Spirit as the Lord and giver of life. He brings new life to the Apostles so that they are more fit for their mission.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not come to condemn the world. He did not send His Apostles to bring judgment and condemnation but to show forth God's mercy and His power over sin and death. God the Father sent His Son in poverty and humility. He sent Him to bring glad tidings to the poor and to proclaim liberty to the captives. Jesus associated Himself with tax collectors, sinners, and the lowly of the earth rather than worldly "power brokers". At the Last Supper, Jesus bent down to wash His disciples' feet. Jesus sends His Apostles forth in a spirit of humility, service, and love.

Nevertheless, He gives them a power – the power to forgive sins. He confers His Spirit upon them so that they may bring God's mercy and deliverance to those in need. He gives them the power of the love He shares with the Father, namely His Holy Spirit, which transforms the Apostles from being cowards to

speaking boldly. Beginning with Pentecost, the Spirit worked through the Church, through the Apostles, to restore unity to the human family, and this mission continues with us today.

At Pentecost, the Spirit of God rushed upon the Apostles and *there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.* What is the language that the Spirit, the source of this unity, taught the Apostles? It is the language of humility. This is what everyone understood. Whether it is Luke, writing in Acts, or John, writing in his Gospel, the Apostles are sent forth. *As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*

Sent in a spirit of humility, they learned to preach not themselves but God, who humbled Himself to become a little child; who humbled Himself accepting even death on a cross; who made Himself low in descending among the dead, but through His humility was raised and is seated at the right hand of the Father. It is after Pentecost that the community of believers is *gathered in prayer*, shared everything in common and was of *one heart and mind* (Acts 4:32).

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit equipped the Apostles and equips the whole Church for her mission: to bring unity and new life to the world. As we, the Church, emerge from the pandemic, we have a special responsibility to bring life and healing to a hurting world, but we do so with humility, cognizant of the gifts that we have received from the Holy Spirit. Humility is the language necessary for true unity. Humility involves thinking less of ourselves and more of God. Our mission begins with the powerful and mighty works of God and proposing the God of Life to the world.

Speaking of Pentecost, Saint John Paul II wrote:

“That event is the beginning of God’s new ‘self-giving’ to humanity. The apostles are the sign and pledge not only of the ‘new Israel,’ but also of the ‘new creation’ effected by the paschal mystery...This victory of life over death, of grace over sin, achieved by Christ works in humanity by means of the Holy Spirit. Through Him, it brings to fruition in our hearts the mystery of redemption. Pentecost is the beginning of the process of spiritual renewal.” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience, 22 July 1989)

At this moment in time, after a year marked by death, our world needs a Church that proposes to them the abundance of life that Christ offers. That first Pentecost was a privileged time, but the Church today needs a new Pentecost, a new outpouring of the Spirit. The Church must call upon the Spirit to bring life to the world. God gives us this moment to be the Church - to mediate the Presence of Christ in the human reality through a renewal in the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, with one voice, we cry out: *Veni, Sancte Spiritus.*