

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEDICATION OF THE CHAPEL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY, FAIRFIELD, CONNECTICUT
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My Dear Friends in Christ,

I am very happy to be with you once again in this beautiful chapel of the Holy Spirit, as we celebrate the 10th anniversary of its dedication. As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's representative to the United States, I want to express the Holy Father's spiritual closeness to you and his paternal affection for you. I assure you of his heartfelt prayers and congratulations on this occasion. I also want to express my gratitude to Father Antony Ciorra for making the arrangements for the liturgy and to the administration, faculty, and staff for their dedication to their vocations to form the hearts and minds of young people.

Rather than begin this homily by reflecting on this chapel, I want to place before you an image more familiar to me: the image of the Holy Spirit in Saint Peter's Basilica. It is part of the *Cathedra Petri* sculpture of Bernini at the back of the apse. The bronze sculpture itself shows four Doctors of the Church – Ambrose, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, and Augustine – supporting the Chair of Saint Peter, a symbol of right doctrine and authority. They are each holding the Chair using only one finger, indicating that it is not human strength but real faith that supports the structure. Connected to the Chair and behind it, is the beautiful window of the Holy Spirit. The window, actually made of alabaster, depicts the Holy Spirit as a dove. If you are standing at the back of the Basilica, the dove appears quite small, as everything in St. Peter's Basilica is perfectly proportioned. In fact, the wingspan of the Dove is six feet! This should make us reflect on a question: How big a part of my life is the Holy Spirit?

The window shows rays of light, shifting from brighter to darker, as they move away from the dove, illustrating the Holy Spirit as a source of light. It is the Holy Spirit who leads and guides the Church, who animates her, and who keeps her indefectible in her doctrine, providing Holy Wisdom from on high. The Holy Spirit enlightens us and helps us to bear light to those around us, reminding us that God has called us *out of darkness into his own marvelous light*.

Turning to this chapel, you will notice the commanding presence of the Risen Lord, also radiating light to the ten Apostles, offering them the gift of peace. In Saint John's Gospel, when Jesus offers them peace, He breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." This is the gift of the Risen Lord to us: the Holy Spirit – the peace of God. Christ is not dead. Christ has been raised in the Spirit. Christ is alive!

In his recent exhortation *Christus vivit*, Pope Francis writes that, "The Holy Spirit fills the heart of the risen Christ and then flows over into your lives. When you receive the Spirit, he draws you ever more deeply into the heart of Christ, so that you can grow in his life, his life and his power." (*Christus vivit*, 130)

This makes us ask once more: What role does the Holy Spirit play in my life? Am I open to receiving his gifts? Do I allow myself to be drawn more deeply into the Heart of Christ? In the Heart of Christ, we find the source of wisdom and knowledge. If you look at this chapel, the exterior walls are designed to suggest the pages of a book, implying the need for dialogue and conversation, especially with one another and the Lord. Although at universities, we can learn a great many things, technical things, and acquire great knowledge, knowledge is not the same thing as wisdom. Saint Bonaventure describes wisdom as

“knowledge infused with charity,” and the Holy Spirit is the bond of charity between the Father and the Son. Dialogue, knowledge, and wisdom demand openness to new ideas, as well as an ability to be critical and discerning in order to encounter the truth that sets us free.

The world will tell us that all sorts of things will make us happy, but worldly wisdom is very different from the Wisdom of God. Consider the Gospel – the Beatitudes – which turns worldly values of wealth and power on their head! How happy Jesus tells us we would be if we were poor in spirit, meek and humble, pure of heart, hungering and thirsting for righteousness!

Sometimes we can be tempted to think that if I live those virtues I will miss out on the good life, miss out on all the fun! The Holy Father reminds us that the Holy Spirit

“takes nothing away from you, but instead helps you to find all that you need, and in the best possible way. Do you need love? You will not find it in dissipation, using other people, or trying to be possessive or domineering. ... Are you seeking powerful emotions? You will not experience them by accumulating material objects, spending money, chasing desperately after the things of this world. They will come, and in a much more beautiful and meaningful way, if you let yourself be prompted by the Holy Spirit.” (*Christus vivit*, 131)

Again, are you open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, whose first work is conversion of heart? I imagine that everyone here is looking for love and to be loved. Openness to the Spirit allows us to experience that love, as Saint Paul tells us in the letter to the Romans: *God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Pope Francis teaches us that “Rather than being too concerned with communicating a great deal of doctrine, let us first try to awaken and consolidate the great experiences that sustain the Christian life. In the words of Romano Guardini, ‘when we experience a great love ... everything becomes a part of it.’” (*Christus vivit*, 212)

We are all aware of the crisis in the Church and the fact that many people have fallen away from the practice of the Faith. We understand the difficulties that some people have with this teaching or that teaching of the Church. Perhaps, the greatest crisis in the Church is the dominance, at times, of judgment over love. Nevertheless, we must not forget how the Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit transformed the Apostles. They went from being discouraged and frightened to being bold, and they set the world on fire with the love of God, having been strengthened by the Holy Spirit who was poured out on them at Pentecost.

That event can never be a thing of the past, something nostalgic. No. Christ is alive. The Holy Spirit is alive – alive and at work in you! If God could transform the world through the Apostles, why could he not continue his work of generating new and committed disciples in and through you?

I encourage you to be open to the Holy Spirit and to wait for his joyful presence. I think of the words of Isaiah: *Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint* (Is 40:31).

It is not simply this Chapel of the Holy Spirit, whose dedication we are celebrating, that is a temple of the Holy Spirit. You are temples of the Holy Spirit. And this Church is *built of living stones!* Christ is alive!

The Holy Spirit is alive in you! Let us each stop and pray – ***Come, Holy Spirit!*** – as we make the words of Isaiah our own: *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted; to proclaim liberty to captives; and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Come, Holy Spirit!*