

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**  
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My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we conclude this Easter Season, as the Apostolic Nuncio, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis, assuring you of his spiritual closeness during this time of pandemic. 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.

As we reflect on this Easter season, I am sure that being under lockdown was not how we imagined we would celebrate the glory of the Risen Lord. A much-loved English author is J.R.R. Tolkien, who wrote *The Lord of the Rings*. At a certain point in the Trilogy, there is a conversation between Frodo, the hobbit, and Gandalf, the wizard, about the evil that is sweeping through Middle Earth. "I wish it had not happened in my time," said Frodo. "So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

During this pandemic, we are all feeling a bit like Frodo. We wish it hadn't happened to us and especially not now, and yet here we are facing unprecedented struggles. It is up to us to decide how to use the time and the gifts given to us to grow from the struggle. The Apostles must have felt that way after the Passion and Death of the Lord, and again, after His Ascension into heaven.

After their abandonment of Jesus in His hour of trial, the Apostles wished that those events hadn't happened. They were paralyzed, trapped behind closed doors in a state of fear. The Risen Lord passed through their locked doors. He showed them His wounds, and the disciples recognized that the One who had been crucified was now alive. In the Gospel, Jesus, after wishing them peace twice, says, "*As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit.*"

We too have been locked behind closed doors for most of the Easter season, and now Jesus comes to us, saying, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*" He wants us to have interior peace, to receive the Spirit, to know God's mercy, and to be fit for mission.

Jesus breathed the Spirit on the Apostles. This is the Johannine Pentecost. His breathing on them recalls Genesis 2:7, when God breathed the breath of life into man, and Ezekiel 37:9, the prophecy of the dry bones, whereby the Spirit restores life. Jesus' breathing the Spirit on the Apostles represents the Spirit as the giver of life and the principle of the new creation.

The words – *As the Father has sent me, so I send you* – are a reminder that it is the Spirit of God who will enable the Apostles to carry out their mission and who will confer on them the power to take away sins. The Breath of God is at the same time prophetic and ministerial. The Holy Spirit equips the Apostles and the whole Church for mission. Pope Francis wants a missionary Church, one that is in a permanent state of mission and that is open to ongoing pastoral conversion to carry out the mission of bringing the joy of the Gospel to others.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit appears as a Divine Power who helps bring the mission to fulfillment, transforming the Apostles from being cowardly to being bold. Peter, who denied Jesus three times, preaches on the day of Pentecost and converts thousands by the power of the Spirit.

At Pentecost, the Spirit of God rushed upon them 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.* All who heard them, heard them in their own language and yet all came to knowledge of the mighty acts of God. The Spirit was working through the Church, through the Apostles, to restore unity to the human family.

This is part of the mission of the Church: to bring unity in a polarized world. The fragmentation of the world began with our first parents but worsened after the building of the tower of Babel, when men wanted to make a name for themselves, desiring equality with God. Their project born out of a desire for power and fame, tinged with arrogance. They relied too much on their own efforts and failed to give God the glory that is His due.

It is not unlike our times. We imagined that we were in control of the economy, of life, of practically everything; the pandemic has led to a collapse not only of systems and structures, but hopefully also of our notion of self-sufficiency. We have been forced apart from one another; we are “socially-distanced”.

In contrast to Babel, we have the Lukan Pentecost event, which brings people together in unity according to the Spirit. The difference between Babel and Pentecost lies in the center. That is, around what is our unity built? Around God or around man? In the unity of Pentecost, God is at the center. Each person is not for himself or herself; rather, everyone aims to approach God.

Like the spokes of wheel that proceed toward the hub until they reach unity at single point, so are the members of the Church at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit, the bond of love between the Father and Son, has been poured into our hearts, drawing us away from self-love, narcissism, and from being self-referential and directing us toward God and our destiny.

Before Pentecost, the Apostles argued with each other over who would be the greatest among them. They wanted to sit at Jesus’ right and left. After Pentecost, in openness to the Spirit, their focus is directed toward God and the mission entrusted to them. They had learned the language of humility, which enabled them to be unified in carrying out their mission. No longer under lockdown and relying on God’s power, rather than their own strength, they went forth. The Word of God could not be chained. They would be witnesses, not to their own glory, but to the mighty works of God.

Pentecost was a privileged time, but the Church today needs a new Pentecost, a new outpouring of the Spirit, whose first work is conversion. The Church must call upon the Spirit to renew her, not for maintaining structures, but for her mission of bringing salvation to the world. Emerging from weeks of lockdown, we could with Frodo say, “I wish it had not happened in my time,” but as Gandalf said, “All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

God now gives us this time – this moment – to be the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. He calls us to mediate the Presence of Christ in the human reality through a renewal in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This Pentecost Day, Christ stands before us and says once more, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*" These days we don't want anyone breathing on us. We wear masks to protect ourselves, but let us uncover our faces before Christ. We do not need to be afraid. We need the courage to receive the breath of life, which destroying the contagion of sin, revives us, so that in the power of the Spirit, we may renew the face of the earth!