



From A Bishop's Journal (701)

“Be Sealed with the Holy Spirit, the Gift of God” (1)

On May 27 of this year, on the occasion of Pentecost I published a pastoral letter on the great sacrament of Confirmation. This week and in the weeks to come I am pleased to share my reflections with you: May these lines revive in each one of us the wonderful gifts we have received or which some of us are about to receive.

Come, Holy Spirit

As I prepare to send you my fourteenth Pentecost pastoral letter, a song by Robert Vidal fills my heart like a prayer:

*Come, Holy Spirit, light your Church with your fire
Come, Holy Spirit, to invade the whole world!*

*Pour into our hearts your enthusiasm and your joy
And make us avenues leading to the Lord.*

*Pour into our hearts your kindness, your wisdom
And make us all children of the light.*

*Pour into our hearts youthfulness and faith
And make us a springtime for your People.*

*Pour into our hearts prayer and peace
And make us a leaven of unity.*

Countless Acts of Faith

It is always a privilege for me to celebrate the great sacrament of confirmation. Thanks to God, I have already confirmed close to 8,000 children of the diocese of Edmundston, in the last thirteen years. As I celebrate this beautiful sacrament I must make numerous acts of faith, because it is in faith only that we can grasp what is experienced in the Church and the world, through the sacrament of confirmation.

A first act of faith is truly believing what I have become through my episcopal ordination: a successor of the apostles. The fact of presiding a sacrament such as confirmation unites me not only to my brother bishops but also to the apostles themselves who, through the laying-on of hands, passed on the Holy Spirit to all who wanted to become disciples of Jesus.

There is a second act of faith that I must make: to believe in the communion of saints. The sacrament of confirmation unites us to all our brothers and sisters throughout the world, and the bishop is the bond to all the other Churches and the Pope in particular, but first and foremost with all the brothers and sisters in our diocese.

I must also make a third act of faith: to believe that the Holy Spirit is as present, as powerful, as life-giving as he was on the day of Pentecost. It is always the same flame, the same rushing wind, the same outpouring in the Church.

And my fourth act of faith is to believe that the future confirmed are ready to welcome the Holy Spirit deep within themselves, just like the first disciples in Jerusalem and millions and millions of Christians throughout the world, through the centuries. The future confirmed, parents and sponsors, catechists and pastors, and the whole Christian community all want to welcome the Holy Spirit.

With the whole Church let us pray the Lord to perfect what he has already begun in the hearts of the baptised who are preparing to receive the second sacrament of Christian initiation: “Lord, we are here to celebrate the wonders of your Spirit in us. Make that, thanks to him, we may always better know you, love you, and love our brothers and sisters.”

What is Pentecost?

The word “Pentecost” means that the feast celebrated on that day takes place “fifty days” after Easter Sunday. The feast started off as an agrarian celebration, the “Feast of Harvests,” a day of joy and thanksgiving. The first books of the Bible, especially Exodus and Leviticus, point out that Pentecost was then the day when the first-fruits of the earth, the first sheaves of wheat, were offered. This feast usually took place seven weeks after the Passover. However, the feast was quickly given a new meaning, the commemoration of the Covenant of Sinai, fifty days after the Hebrews came out of Egypt. Ancient manuscripts, especially those of Qumran and the writings of the rabbis stress this feast which was celebrated by all the Jews, along with the Passover and the Feast of Tents. Along with these two feasts, Pentecost was one of the three celebrations of the people of God. The people wanted to remember from age to age God’s manifestation to them, the ‘theophany’ where God gave His people the gift of the ten commandments of the Covenant.

A Mighty Wind

In Saint Luke’s account of the Christian Pentecost, we also find, there, signs of this “theophany” of God, especially wind and fire. In sending the Holy Spirit on the first community, “fifty” days after Christ’s great Paschal Event, a totally new meaning was given to this feast. It is the accomplishment of the promise Jesus made to his disciples when he was about to leave this earth. “Within a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.” It was also the fulfillment of what the Prophets – especially Ezekiel and Joel – had announced to the people of God, that in the endtime the Holy Spirit would be poured out on everyone.

Word images are not lacking to describe the day of Pentecost: Outpouring of the Spirit, Crowning of Christ's Passover, Gathering of the Messianic community, Community open to all the nations, Inauguration of the Mission, Mystery of salvation. All these words try to describe the Great Event that happened at the heart of humanity nearly two thousand years ago. In different ways, it is this same coming of the Holy spirit that happens every time we celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation.

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

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