

The Feast of Pentecost Sunday, Whit Sunday *by Fr. Francis Xavier Weninger, 1877* “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.”—Acts ii, 4.

“And He commanded that they should not depart from Jerusalem; but should wait for the promise of the Father, which you have heard,” said He, “by My mouth, that you may give testimony of Me, even to the uttermost bounds of the earth.” Thus runs the admonition of the Lord before His ascension. (Acts i, 4-8.)

The Apostles, therefore, with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and many of His disciples, obeying the command of Christ, remained at Jerusalem, united in prayer; and, behold, after ten days, the promise of Christ was fulfilled: “Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting; and the Holy Ghost came down upon them in the form of fiery tongues, and sat upon every one of them.”

Then did this Spirit of light replenish their souls with knowledge, power, and love; and enrich them with His sevenfold gifts. St. Paul says of himself, that the same Lord Who decreed that there should be light, caused the light of knowledge in holy faith to irradiate his soul; and so it was with the disciples assembled at Jerusalem. Their understanding seemed darkened; they were faint-hearted and timid since the ascension of Him Who was at once their Lord, their Saviour, and beloved Friend. They remained secluded—“behind bolt and bar,”—not daring to appear in public; but, lo! that fear suddenly vanished, for seven new and most precious gifts were bestowed upon them.

With unfaltering courage they went forth to proclaim the truths of Christianity, and to preach “Christ crucified” to the same people who had been guilty of His death upon the cross; and the grace of God touched the hearts of that vast multitude, as they listened, with rapt attention, to their inspired words. Thousands were converted on the spot; and the Church celebrated her birthday on earth, and extended her mission, from that very day, to the utmost limits of the globe.

There can be no greater happiness on earth, beloved in Christ, than the privilege of belonging to the true Church—the only one in which salvation is to be found. But mere external membership will not confer it upon us. We must become living temples of the Holy Ghost, letting our faith shine forth in our lives with a luster so brilliant that it will attract numberless souls to the fold of Christ. The seven gifts, with which the Holy Ghost enriches all who worthily receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, will produce this effect in our souls.

Let us consider today in what essentially consists each one of these, and see in what manner they influence the uninterrupted duration of the kingdom of God in our souls. O Mary, obtain for us, from the Holy Ghost, thy divine Spouse, the grace to retain in our hearts the influence of His sevenfold gifts! I speak in the most holy name of Jesus, for the greater honor and glory of God!

St. John says: “Thus spoke Christ of the Holy Spirit, whom every one that believes in Him shall receive.” The miracle which God vouchsafed to work on Pentecost Sunday, namely, the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, was a peculiar grace conferred upon those companions of Jesus Christ, as was also the extraordinary gift of speaking in divers tongues, and penetrating, with prophetic vision, the mysteries of the future. Yes, my brethren, these were gifts of the Holy Ghost, indeed, but reserved for the Apostles alone, apart from those sevenfold gifts which that divine Spirit confers upon all who worthily receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. Through this Spirit of love, the Apostles communicated them to all the faithful, to whom, after their baptism, they administered this Sacrament, as the Acts of the Apostles certify.

What are the effects of this Sacrament? It strengthens us in our determination to belong to the kingdom of Christ—the kingdom of God—the Holy Church; to live as her children; to propagate the faith according to our strength and ability; and even, should God require it of us, to sacrifice life itself rather than be false to its teachings. That we may be enabled to do all this, we must not only receive the Sacrament of Confirmation exteriorly; but the graces it confers must penetrate to the very depths of our hearts.

Let us consider today in what the essence of each of these gifts consists; and we will arrive at a clearer understanding of the relation which each one of them bears toward the continuance and increase of the kingdom of God in our hearts.

The first gift—in the order in which they are imparted to us—is “Fear of the Lord” which so disposes our hearts that we entertain no fear whatever, except of God, and the possibility of offending that Divine Being by sin. This gift implies a heart free from sin and filled with a true, sincere, and effective resolution to avoid the most trivial venial sin and imperfection.

When this gift fills our hearts, then indeed the kingdom of God is firmly established therein, and we are temples of the Holy Ghost. But, alas! how many there are who receive not this heavenly gift in its plenitude; who waver and falter in the service of God; and who, so far from being inspired by a holy fear of offending Him, rather allow the fear of men, or human respect, to take entire control of their actions.

The second gift of the Holy Ghost is Piety, which leads us to a state of perpetual prayer, so that we not only perform our prescribed devotions at certain times, but, through them, become united in so intimate a manner with God that we walk constantly in His presence, and live so that the salutation of the angel to the Immaculate Virgin: “The Lord is with thee,” might well be applied to us.

As long as prayer is regarded by us only in the light of an obligation, we are yet very imperfect children of God; but if, on the contrary, we find it an absolute necessity—if it be for our spirits, what breath is to the body—then is the kingdom of God firm in our hearts; then are we indeed confirmed in the service of our Creator, and living temples of the Holy Ghost. O how many are there who waver in this holy service! The spirit of prayer is wanting in them; their devotions bring them no nearer to God, whereas they should tend to promote an intimate union with Him.

The third gift of the Holy Ghost is Knowledge, through which we become versed in the science of salvation, and thoroughly impressed with the truth, that the great affair of our eternal welfare should first rank in our estimation; and become fully resolved that nothing shall prevent the permanent establishment of the kingdom of God in our hearts. This heavenly knowledge renders us fully alive to the perils which threaten the salvation of those who, while living in the world, strive always, according to the spirit of the world, to possess and to enjoy; and this always in an ever-increasing degree, and for as long a time as possible.

Not so the Christian whose soul, enriched by God the Holy Ghost, is filled with this holy science. He will continually have in view the warning of our Lord: “What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” And when the tempter places before him some favorite, though forbidden, pleasure, or paints in glowing colors the joys of yielding to some darling sin, he will pause and ask himself that question, Will I spurn the tempter from my heart or not?

When the charms of earthly pleasures and temporal enjoyments were held up to St. Aloysius, by those who wished to make him waver in his resolution to dedicate himself to God in the religious state, he would silence them by asking: "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"—Such a soul recognizes the value of time, and employs it accordingly, knowing well that death, which is most surely approaching, is but the pathway to an eternity, which it depends upon him to make happy or miserable.

The Christian who entertains such sentiments will remain firm and unshaken amid the tempests of life, and may feel assured that the kingdom of God is established in his heart. But by far the greater number who call themselves children of the one true Church, and have even received the Sacrament of Confirmation, do not respond to the dignity of their vocation. Carried away entirely by the affairs of the world, their only anxiety is for pleasure, or for gain—for the things of earth which pass away.

The fourth gift, with which we are favored by the munificence of the Holy Ghost, is Counsel. This gift floods the soul with celestial light sufficient to discern what is pleasing to God in the various circumstances of life. It guards us against the evil of seeking advice from vain and worldly minds, and inspires us to go directly to the representatives of Christ on earth. The life of the Christian who receives this gift is blessed with that peace which the world can not give, and, God reigning in his heart by His grace, the divine kingdom is firmly established therein.

But too many go in quest of advice from those who are filled with the spirit of the world, and who can not impart what they do not possess; and instead of receiving benefit, the petitioner wavers in the service of God; nay, sometimes abandons it entirely.

The fifth gift of the Holy Ghost is Fortitude, which enables the recipient to embrace, and bear patiently, all the crosses which are inseparable from that state of life, to which he has been called by the most holy will of God, and to fulfill the duties connected therewith, in spite of every obstacle. From this gift also arises that disposition which inspires the soul with an esteem for tribulations, a love of sufferings, and an ardent desire to bear the cross for the sake of Jesus Christ. Whoever is thus disposed may enjoy the blessed assurance that the kingdom of God is confirmed in his heart, and that, by a faithful correspondence with divine grace, he will combat valiantly and bear away the palm of victory.

Where, however, this steadfast love of sufferings through love of Christ exists not, the prayer, "Thy kingdom come," arises not as much from the heart, but from the lips only; and the kingdom of God is often endangered.

The sixth gift which the Holy Spirit offers us, in the Sacrament of Confirmation, is Understanding, which enables man to look at, and judge every thing in this world, through the light of holy faith, and to live accordingly. In this way his confession of faith will not proceed from the lips only, but all its teachings will appear, in a manner most clear and distinct, to his spiritual vision. The kingdom of God is truly and firmly established in that blessed soul, and grace will constantly increase therein, to enable her to resist all the attacks of the infernal enemy. Then will the purity of her intention exalt and multiply the merit of her good works before God. O that all would endeavor, by a worthy preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation, to receive this gift in its plenitude! But too often it is not the case.

Finally, the seventh gift is the gift of Wisdom, which is essentially the gift of well-ordered love to God and our neighbor, by which the Christian finds his delight in the fulfillment of the precept which enjoins upon us to love God above all, and our neighbor as ourselves. Of such love it is written that it is stronger than death. It induces us to give up all earthly joys and worldly treasures for Christ's dear sake; and whoever is aware of possessing it, may well exclaim, with St. Paul: "What can separate us from the love of Christ? Hunger, misery, poverty, death; we overcome them all through Him whom we love."

But, beloved Christians, when every portion of the heart is engrossed by self, there can be no thought of faithful perseverance amid the storms and temptations of life. What weighty and all-powerful motives should on this glorious day, the birthday of our Holy Church, inspire us to assemble in spirit, with the Mother of Jesus and the holy Apostles and disciples of the Lord, as they awaited the descent of the divine Spirit. From the very depths of our hearts let us cry out: "Come, Holy Ghost, replenish our hearts with Thy love, that its ardent fire may animate our souls. Banish therefrom all aversion to prayer, and that spirit of the world which seeks our ruin. Banish from our hearts all unrest, faint-heartedness, forgetfulness of the truths of faith; above all, of the four last things which await us: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. Cast from our hearts the spirit of self-love, and lead us, through thy sevenfold gifts, to love God above all, and in Him all whom He has created for Himself; and so confirm these dispositions in our hearts, that we may become, and remain Thy living temples, sanctified through thy love for all eternity."—Amen.

