



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE PARISH OF St ATHANASIUS IN ROME

SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST
HOMILY OF THE POPE JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 18 May 1997

1. *Veni Creator Spiritus! "The earth is full of your Spirit, Lord"* (Responsorial Psalm, refrain, Italian Lectionary).

This is what the Church exclaims today as she celebrates the Solemnity of Pentecost, which closes the Easter season focused on Christ's Death and Resurrection.

After the Resurrection, Christ appeared to the Apostles several times (cf. Acts 1:3), strengthening their faith and preparing them to begin the great evangelizing mission which was definitively passed on to them at the time of his Ascension into heaven. These were the last words Jesus spoke on earth to his Apostles: "*Go into all the world*" (Mk 16:15). "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:19-20).

2. Previously Jesus had told the Eleven to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Consoler. He had said to them: "*before many days* you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). Following Jesus' instructions, they returned from the Mount of Olives to the Upper Room, where they had gathered with the Master for the last time, and there, with Mary, they remained steadfast in prayer, waiting for the promised event. On the Solemnity of Pentecost there occurred the extraordinary event described in the Acts of the Apostles, which marks the birth of the Church. "Suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other

tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:2-4). These extraordinary phenomena attracted the attention of the Israelites and the proselytes present in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. They were amazed at that rush of wind and still more at hearing the Apostles speak in different tongues. Coming from many parts of the world, they heard these 12 Galileans each speaking in his own language: “We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11).

3. In the Acts of the Apostles, St Luke describes the extraordinary manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as a communication of the very vitality of God who gives himself to men. This divine gift is also *light and power*. *light*, to proclaim the Gospel, the Truth revealed by God; *power*, to infuse the courage of witnessing to the faith, which the Apostles begin at that very moment.

Christ had said to them: “*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth* (Acts 1:8). Precisely to prepare them for this great mission, Jesus had promised them the Holy Spirit on the day before his Passion, in the Upper Room, telling them: “When the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also *are witnesses*, because you have been with me from the beginning” (Jn 15:26-27).

The witness of the Spirit of truth must become one with that of the Apostles, thus fusing the divine and human witness into one saving reality. From this fusion flows the work of evangelization, begun on the day of Pentecost and entrusted to the Church as her task and mission down the ages.

4. Dear brothers and sisters of St Athanasius Parish, I greet you all affectionately. My cordial thoughts turn first of all to the Cardinal Vicar, to the Auxiliary Bishop of the area, to your parish priest, Fr Vincenzo Luzi, to the curate and to the priests who assist him in pastoral work. My cordial thoughts also turn to the Mayor of Rome. I joyfully greet all of you, gathered today in large numbers in your parish church, which has been recently renovated thanks to your generous and praiseworthy contributions. Through you, I would like to extend an affectionate remembrance and the assurance of my prayers to all the sick and elderly of the parish who are unable to be here with us.

Thank you for your warm welcome and your best wishes for my birthday. On this day, so significant for me, I am pleased to be in your community which has a wealth of different spiritual experiences. I thank the pastoral council, the many well-organized parish groups and all the residents of the seven districts into which the territory is divided. I know that every year, at this time, the feast of your patron saint is celebrated with various popular events designed to foster the knowledge and unity of families by creating esteem and friendship among those who work together in proclaiming the Gospel, which is an essential task of the Christian community. I

express my appreciation of your efforts and I encourage you to continue making the most of these cultural and religious traditions.

5. Today's liturgy invites us to welcome the gift of the Spirit with generous readiness, to be able to proclaim the risen Lord effectively. Proclaim him, dear brothers and sisters, on the occasions and in the ways that circumstances offer you. I know that you are already doing so in many worthwhile ways: in the catechetical groups for sacramental preparation and in the parish centre by your witness of charity and through the popular festivals and events, in the counseling centres, in homes and in the neighbourhood. Supported, too, by the impulse of the *city mission*, endeavour to pass on to everyone the newness of the Gospel, by seeking ways and means that respond ever better to the needs of people today.

Christ is the Truth, the Life, the Way. After ascending into heaven, he sent the Spirit of unity, who calls the Church to live in communion internally and to bring to completion the evangelizing mission in the world.

I am addressing you in particular, young people and children who live in the parish: do not be afraid of Christ, be his apostles among your peers, who in this neighbourhood, as in other parts of the city, frequently have to face very serious problems.

I am thinking of unemployment and the difficult search for meaning in life, which can lead to despair, to drugs or even to absurd and reckless acts. The *city mission*, which concerns your parish too, calls all believers to proclaim the hope of the Gospel in every context and in every family.

6. "The Spirit of truth ... *will guide you into all the truth*.... He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (Jn 16:13-14). From Jesus' promise comes the certainty of fidelity in teaching, an essential part of the Church's mission. In this proclamation, which takes place throughout history, the Holy Spirit is present and active with the light and power of divine Truth. The Spirit of Truth enlightens the human spirit, as St Paul says: "and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). His presence creates new awareness and knowledge about revealed truth, thus making it possible to share in the knowledge of God himself. In this way, the Holy Spirit reveals the crucified and risen Christ to men, and shows the way to become ever more like him.

All the great works of God begin with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, both in the life of individuals and in that of the whole Ecclesial Community. Born on the day of the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Church is constantly reborn through the work of that same Spirit in many places throughout the world, in many human hearts, in various cultures and nations.

7. "*Veni Creator Spiritus!*", the whole Church prays today with great fervour. Your beautiful community also prays for this. Today, together with your Bishop, it is also celebrating its own birth

in the Spirit. Indeed, if the Church in her broadest, most catholic and universal dimension was born on the day of Pentecost, all the Christian communities that are in unity and communion with their pastors, with the College of Bishops and with the Successor of Peter, were already present at that very moment. The Holy Spirit continues today to carry out the great works of salvation begun on the day of Pentecost.

“Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love” (Gospel acclamation).

Amen!

© Copyright 1997 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana