

Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2: 1-11; Ps. 104; 1 Cor. 12: 3b-7, 12-13; Jn. 20: 19-23

It was Sunday, May 29, 1977. My friend and I were on an extended road trip in Europe. We had overnighted in a campground near the town of Karlovy Vary in the former Czechoslovakia. The banks and currency exchange offices (and many stores) were closed so we were unable to exchange the vouchers, that we had been forced to purchase by the government, into the local currency. With no money to buy food, we subsisted on a can of peaches until Monday morning. I found out later that the holiday was Pentecost Sunday. Such was my first memory of Pentecost before I became a Catholic. It is still amazing to me that, in a country that was occupied by communist U.S.S.R., Pentecost Sunday was given such importance.

In Rome, at the Pantheon, a circular-shaped and domed church, Pentecost is celebrated in a very unique way. In the centre of the dome, 43 metres above the floor, there is a circular hole open to the sky called: the Oculus. Every year, on Pentecost Sunday, local firemen climb the roof and shower the congregation with thousands of red rose petals through the Oculus.

In a Pentecost homily, St John Chrysostom said the following: 'Not long ago, we celebrated the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and then His Ascension into heaven. Today, we have reached the supreme and final grace, the most important feast, the actual fulfillment of the Lord's promise.'

Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, a Carmelite mystic, in his book entitled *The Divine Intimacy* put it this way: 'Pentecost is the plenitude (*the completeness, the fullness*) of God's gift to man. On Christmas Day, God gives us His only-begotten Son, Jesus, the Mediator, the Bridge connecting humanity and divinity. During Holy Week, Jesus, by His Passion, gives Himself entirely for us, even to death on the Cross. At Easter, Christ rises, and His Resurrection, as well as His Ascension, is the pledge of our own glorification... but the gift of God to man does not end there; having ascended into heaven, Jesus, in union with the Father sends us His Spirit, the Holy Spirit; the bond and pledge of the mutual love of the Father and Son.'

Fr. Gabriel went on to say: 'Thus, the three Persons of the Trinity give Themselves to man, stooping to this poor nothing to redeem him from sin, to sanctify him, and to bring him into their intimacy. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not a temporary gift but a permanent one.'

Considering the enormity of God's gift to us, it is unfortunate that, in North America, Pentecost is not given much attention. It may be celebrated in the Church, but, in most of society, it goes unnoticed. However, in Europe, it seems that much more importance is given to Pentecost Sunday, if my memories of it are any indication.

Through the Catechism, the Church teaches us that, in Confirmation, we are sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit which include: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. These gifts complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them.

We have been given the great gift of the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians wrote: 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.' (1Cor 12: 7) We need to ask ourselves: 'What am I doing with the gift? How can I make better use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the common good?'