

Be open to the gifts of the Spirit
By Bishop Milan Lach, SJ

Pentecost, in a certain sense, celebrates the birthday of the church. There, in the Upper room, the Apostles were gathered together with the Mother of God in prayer.

In that moment, the promise of Jesus Christ was fulfilled. He who promised the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, now sends it in the form of tongues of fire on the disciples in the Upper Room.

We may also think of the cross with the mind of the Fathers of the Church.

The church began at the cross, when blood and water poured out from Jesus' side (Jn 19:34). This is reflected in the Gospel of Pentecost, where Jesus proclaims, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink" (Jn 7:37).

Jesus spoke this prophecy about the Spirit, as the narrator maintains: "He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified" (Jn 7:39).

What is the living water but the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ? It is in each and every one of us, for as Christ tells us: "Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him'" (Jn 7:38). This is a mystery of God.

Through the sacraments of the church we receive the Spirit, particularly in the mysteries of initiation.

All of the sacraments in the life of the church are imbued with the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is highlighted in the Byzantine tradition, where every sacrament is prefaced by the calling down of the Holy Spirit, an *epiclesis*.

Further, the Byzantine tradition begins almost all liturgical prayer with an *epiclesis*, a calling down of the Holy Spirit, when we pray the ancient hymn, "Heavenly King, Comforter."

In recognizing the presence of the Holy Spirit before our prayer, we recognize what Paul says, that we are not praying on our own, but with the Spirit that groans inwardly in us (Rom 8:23-26). We have divine accompaniment given to us by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Holy Trinity, as the Creed tells us, the "Giver of life." This gives us a clue about who he is in the life of the church.

The mind of the Fathers of the Church, as reflected in the Creed, makes this clear. The question to ask is not necessarily, "Who is the Spirit?" but "What does he do?" In particular, "What is he doing in our lives?"

For this reason, the Apostle Paul names the gifts of the Spirit in order to distinguish who has them and who does not. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). These signify the presence of the Spirit in our lives.

If we have the Spirit, then we have Christ.

In a world looking for signs, the most important signs we can give for the presence of God in the world are our authenticity and testimony.

With the testimony of our lives, invigorated by the gifts of the Spirit, we can give people refreshing water to drink.

This article is an excerpt from the homily Bishop Lach gave on Pentecost at the Church of St. Anthony the Abbot in Rome.

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