

Last Sunday was the feast of Pentecost, fifty days after Easter. In the Christian Church, it recalls the day when the Holy Spirit empowered the Apostles.

Accompanied by a mighty wind and fiery tongues, God's Spirit came upon Jesus' disciples and gave them a boldness to tell the world about Jesus' resurrection and call to conversion, faith, and a new way of life. This is why we call Pentecost the birthday of the Church.

At Notre Dame Basilica on Pentecost, we had two celebrations of the Sacrament of Confirmation. At the English-speaking Mass, there were 34 candidates who ranged in age from the low teens to the mid-80s. At the French-speaking Mass, there were more than 70 candidates, many of them new arrivals from Africa and Haiti.

The cathedral was bursting with enthusiasm and joy. Parents and sponsors rejoiced in those they came to support in their Christian journey as disciples of Jesus.

The Rite of Confirmation highlights the continuity between the events of the early Church following Pentecost and life in the Church in later generations. "The Apostles, who had received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in fulfillment of the Lord's promise, had power to complete the work of Baptism by the giving of the Holy Spirit, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles."

Then, it goes on to contrast the earlier age and subsequent periods: "When Saint Paul had laid his hands on certain people who had been baptized, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied ... Even if today the coming of the Holy Spirit is no longer widely made manifest by the gift of tongues, we know by faith that the Spirit ... is received by us and is working to make the Church holy and one."

Though the Holy Spirit is "no longer widely made manifest by the gift of tongues," we see an exception in the "charismatic renewal," which this year celebrates fifty years in the Roman Catholic Church. "Charism" doesn't refer to personal magnetism, but rather to gifts—supernatural gifts that the Holy Spirit gives the Church to continue the work of Christ on earth. The gifts include healing, prophecy, and the discernment of spirits.

Last weekend in Rome, Pope Francis celebrated with Christians from 120 countries a religious expression that resonates with the evangelical and Pentecostal churches. The Holy Father invited his friend, Pastor Traettino, and other Christian leaders to join him in giving thanks for this gift given to the Catholic Church for its spiritual renewal.

Pope Francis thanked the Catholic Fraternity and International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services for fulfilling his request of two years ago to organize a vibrant, united international Prayer Vigil to mark the Golden Jubilee of a spiritual blessing in Catholicism:

“Thank you, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, for what you have given to the Church in these fifty years! The Church counts on you, on your fidelity to God’s word, on your readiness to serve, and on your testimony of lives transformed by the Holy Spirit!”

Pope Francis went on to challenge his hearers to offer to others what they have been given:

“To share baptism in the Holy Spirit with everyone in the Church, to praise the Lord unceasingly, to walk together with Christians of different Churches and Ecclesial Communities in prayer and activity on behalf of those in greatest need, to serve the poor and the sick. This is what the Church and the Pope expect from you, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, but also from everyone here: all of you who have become part of this flood of grace.”