



Series: **HOLY SPIRIT**

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And they were filled with the Holy Spirit

(Acts of the Apostles 2:4)

So it occurred in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Today, gathered here in this square, which represents the heart of the Catholic world, we relive the atmosphere of that day. During our times too, just like during the Last Supper in Jerusalem, a “strong wind!” passes through the Church. It too experiences the divine breath of the Holy Spirit, who opens it up to the evangelisation of the world.

It is a happy coincidence, that during today’s solemnities we have the joy of having here, beside the alter, the venerated remains of Blessed Pope John XXIII, who was moulded with God’s Spirit, and made into an admirable witness of His love. My most venerated predecessor left this life 38 years ago now, on the 3rd of June 1963, while, in St. Peter’s Square, there was a great crowd of people who had gathered together to pray, to be spiritually present at his bedside. To their prayers we would like to add today’s celebration, and while we commemorate the death of this Blessed Pope, we give praise to God who granted him as a gift, to the Church and to the world.

As a priest, as a bishop and as a Pope, Blessed Angelo Roncalli was always most docile towards the action of

the Holy Spirit, who guided him on his pathway towards holiness. For this reason, in the living community of saints, we would like to celebrate the solemnity of Pentecost together with him, allowing some of his inspiring reflections to accompany us.

“The light of the Holy Spirit is introduced from the very first words of the book of the Acts of the Apostles. The impetuous march of the Divine Spirit precedes and accompanies the evangelisers, by penetrating the souls of those who listen to them and by opening up the Catholic Church throughout the Earth, down through all the centuries of history.”(From: Discourse, messages and interviews with the Holy Father Pope John XXIII, page: 398).

It is with these words, exclaimed during Pentecost of 1960 that Pope John helps us to welcome the boundless missionary spirit, which is part of the mystery that we have come to celebrate on this solemn occasion. The Church is a born missionary, because it is born of the Father, who sent Christ into the world, it is born of his Son, who died and rose again, who sent the Apostles and all people, and it is born of the Holy Spirit, who places light and strength within men, that we need in order to be able to help that same mission.

Also in this, its original missionary dimension, the Church is an icon of the Most Holy Trinity. It reflects in its history the abundance of God’s own fertility, that is a

fountain of love, which generates life and communion. It is with his presence and by means of his actions within the world, that the Church propagates this mysterious dynamism among men, diffusing the Kingdom of God which “is justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rm 14:17).

The Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, which was announced, called upon and opened by Pope John XXIII, was well aware of this vocation of the Church.

The Holy Spirit may well be considered to be the protagonist of the Council, from when the Pope invoked it, declaring to have welcomed, as something from above, an intimate voice which resounded within his soul (From: Cost. Ap. Humanae salutis, 25th Dec. 1961, 6). That “gentle breeze” soon became “a strong wind” and the event of the council became a renewed Pentecost. “It is in fact, within the doctrine and spirit of Pentecost, affirmed Pope John, that the great event of the Ecumenical Council takes on its life and its substance.” (From: Discourse, Messages and Interviews page: 398).

My dear brothers and sisters, if today we call to mind that singular ecclesiastical season, it is due to the fact that the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 has much to do with the 2nd Vatican Council, taking on a numerous amount of its doctrines and methods. The recent extraordinary Consistory once again proposed the validity and richness of the Council for new generations of Chris-

tians. All of this is another reason for us to be thankful towards Saint Pope John XXIII.

In particular, within the context of today's celebrations, which associate Pentecost with a solemn act of veneration, I would like to underline the fact that the most precious gift left by Pope John to the People of God was his gift of himself, that is, his testimony of holiness.

What he said about saints is valid also for himself, that is, that each one of them is a "masterpiece of the grace of the Holy Spirit". And calling to mind the martyrs and popes buried in St. Peter's, he added the following words, that it is quite moving to listen to once again, today: "Even though the relics of their bodies may be reduced to little or nothing, the memory of them and their prayers are always present here". And he also exclaimed: "Oh! Saints, saints of the Lord, who gladden us, encourage us and bless us".

Pope John Paul's expressions, confirmed by the luminous example of his existence, help to shed some light on the importance of the choice of sanctity, as a privileged path of the Church, at the beginning of the new millennium (From: New Millennium, 30-31).

This generous willingness to collaborate with the Holy Spirit for one's own sanctification and that of one's brothers is, in fact, a necessary and vital condition for new evangelisation.

If evangelisation requires sanctity, sanctity in turn needs the nourishment of spiritual life: of prayer and of the intimate union with God by means of the Word and the Sacraments. It needs a deep and personal life within the spirit.

How can we forget to mention, in this regard, the rich spiritual inheritance left to us by Blessed Pope John XXIII in his “Diary of the Soul”.

Within the pages of this book, we can admire from close up, the daily effort, even from his early days in the seminary, with which he fully wished to correspond to the actions of the Holy Spirit. He allowed himself to be moulded by the Holy Spirit day by day, patiently striving in order to become conformant with his will. Here lies the secret of the goodness by means of which he managed to conquer God’s people along with so many men of good will.

Trusting in his intercession, today we would like to ask the Lord to grant that the grace of the Great Jubilee may irradiate over the new millennium, by means of the testimony of the holiness of Christians. Let us faithfully profess that this may be possible. It is possible by means of the action of the Paraclete Spirit, who, according to the promises of Christ, is always by our side.

Animated by a true sense of hope, in the words of Saint Pope John XXIII let us say: “Oh Paraclete Spirit,

make the prayer that we say in the name of the whole world be strong and continuous: bring each one of us closer to the times of a deeper inner life, let our apostolate, that wishes to reach all men and all peoples, soar skywards... mortify our natural presumption, and lift us up towards holy humility, make us fear God, and make us become generously courageous. Let no earthly link prevent us from honouring our vocation, or no interest, due to our indolence, mortify the needs for justice, let no calculation reduce the immense amount of room for charity within the narrow confines of our own selfishness. Let everything be great within us, the search for truth and holiness: our readiness to sacrifice even to the point of death or indeed the cross. And lastly, let everything correspond to the extreme prayer of the Son of the Heavenly Father, and to that effusion of you, oh Holy Spirit of love, that the Father and the Son poured over the Church, its institutions, individual souls and entire civilisations. (From: Discourse, Messages, Interviews, page: 350).

Veni, Sancte Spiritus, veni!

*The solemnities of Pentecost,
3rd June 2001*

Joannes Paulus n. II