

## **Pentecost Sunday, May 11, 2008**

The Gospel for Pentecost Sunday includes the greeting of Christ, "Peace be with you." This is the same greeting that our Holy Father used at the beginning of the Mass for over 46,000 people gathered at Nationals Park on Thursday, April 17.

Those words frame the context for our reflection on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit today. The first reading for Pentecost is taken from the Acts of the Apostles where we recognize the beginning of the Church and the gathering together of people from every land and nation who will become one in the Holy Spirit.

"We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites,  
inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia,  
Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,  
Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene,  
as well as travelers from Rome,  
both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs,  
yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues  
of the mighty acts of God."

In his words of welcome to the Pope, Archbishop Wuerl made reference to the same phenomenon taking place in this great archdiocese.

"This Church from all of America – as it gathers in worship and seeks to reflect your call to be a people saved in hope – shows a face reflective of Africa, Central and South America, India, Asia, Europe as well as our own Native Americans and those who trace their families to people who came in successive waves of immigration going all the way back to the arrival of the first Catholics in this part of the world at Saint Mary's, Maryland."

In that homily, the Holy Father went on to speak to us of our need to recognize the Church as the instrument of Christ's work in the world today, mediating the action of the Spirit for all of us. "The readings of today's Mass invite us to consider the growth of the Church in America as one chapter in the greater story of the Church's expansion following the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In those readings we see the inseparable link between the risen Lord, the gift of the Spirit for the forgiveness of sins, and the mystery of the Church. Christ established his Church on the foundation of the Apostles (cf. Rev 21:14) as a visible, structured community which is at the same time a spiritual communion, a mystical body enlivened by the Spirit's manifold gifts, and the sacrament of salvation for all humanity (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 8). In every time and place, the Church is called to grow in unity through constant conversion to Christ, whose saving work is proclaimed by the Successors of the Apostles and celebrated in the sacraments. This unity, in turn, gives rise to an unceasing missionary outreach, as the Spirit spurs believers to proclaim 'the great works of

God' and to invite all people to enter the community of those saved by the blood of Christ and granted new life in his Spirit."

We are reminded once again of the nature and role of the Church as the instrument of our salvation and how important the sacraments are in our efforts to draw closer to Christ and through him to be united with the Father.

The Holy Father continued in his homily with these words: "Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth!" (cf. Ps 104:30). The words of today's Responsorial Psalm are a prayer which rises up from the heart of the Church in every time and place. They remind us that the Holy Spirit has been poured out as the first fruits of a new creation, 'new heavens and a new earth' (cf. 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1), in which God's peace will reign and the human family will be reconciled in justice and love. We have heard Saint Paul tell us that all creation is even now "groaning" in expectation of that true freedom which is God's gift to his children (Rom 8:21-22), a freedom which enables us to live in conformity to his will. Today let us pray fervently that the Church in America will be renewed in that same Spirit, and sustained in her mission of proclaiming the Gospel to a world that longs for genuine freedom (cf. Jn 8:32), authentic happiness, and the fulfillment of its deepest aspirations!"

How does all this happen? How is it that Christ continues to reach us in and through his Church and touch us in the sacraments? It is precisely in the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Apostles and through them on the Church that this wondrous action of God continues to be present in our lives. The Holy Father continued in his homily with that reminder.

"In today's Gospel, the risen Lord bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and grants them the authority to forgive sins. Through the surpassing power of Christ's grace, entrusted to frail human ministers, the Church is constantly reborn and each of us is given the hope of a new beginning. Let us trust in the Spirit's power to inspire conversion, to heal every wound, to overcome every division, and to inspire new life and freedom. How much we need these gifts! And how close at hand they are, particularly in the sacrament of Penance! The liberating power of this sacrament, in which our honest confession of sin is met by God's merciful word of pardon and peace, needs to be rediscovered and reappropriated by every Catholic. To a great extent, the renewal of the Church in America and throughout the world depends on the renewal of the practice of Penance and the growth in holiness which that sacrament both inspires and accomplishes."

Let us conclude these reflections with the words that the Holy Father used to conclude his homily.

“In hope we were saved!” (Rom 8:24).

“Those who have hope must live different lives! (cf. *Spe salvi*, 2). By your prayers, by the witness of your faith, by the fruitfulness of your charity, may you point the way towards that vast horizon of hope which God is even now opening up to his Church, and indeed to all humanity: the vision of a world reconciled and renewed in Christ Jesus, our Savior. To him be all honor and glory, now and forever. Amen!”