

HOMILY — PENTECOST 2020

Acts 2:1-11

Ps 104 R. Lord, send forth your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

1 Cor 12:3-7, 12-13

Jn 20:19-23

I think that of all the liturgical colours of the Church, red is my favourite. It's my favourite because it's a vibrant, powerful and bold colour; a passionate colour that evokes two equally bold and powerful things: fire and blood.

Fire is powerful and passionate; it's alive, and in a sense, it's zealous: it always seeks to grow, to spread. But fire isn't just a force of destruction; it's only destructive when it's wild and uncontrolled. When it's controlled and tempered, fire is actually a force for good, because it purifies and strengthens.

Fire purifies by burning away impurities, junk that contaminates. We see this most clearly in how refiners use fire to purify metals by burning away the dirt from the precious metals, to leave behind only what is pure, perfect and precious.

Fire also strengthens. A blacksmith uses fire to soften metal so that he might shape it, bend it, and fold it, making it stronger and fit for a variety of uses. ***Fire purifies and strengthens.***

Blood, too, is passionate, because it carries life: our bodies need blood to function; without it, we die. And so, blood symbolises life and carries with it a sense of sacredness. That's why, in the Old Testament, animal blood was poured out in sacrifice (oblation) to God to represent the offering of life. And that's precisely the meaning Jesus gave it at the Last Supper: *Take this all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my blood... which will be poured out for you ... for the forgiveness of sins* (Words of Institution). In other words: 'Take my life, O God, that they may have life and have it in abundance' (cf. Jn 10:10).

The Martyrs of the Faith deeply understood this reality, that's why they found joy in offering their lives, in shedding their blood for God in imitation of our Lord. There can be no greater offering than giving one's own life to God out of love for Him (cf. Jn 15:13). ***Blood is life and passion.***

Fire and blood — ***purification, strengthening, life and passion*** —, this is what the colour red symbolises, and it's not just my own sentimental interpretation; it's the very reason we use the colour red for the feast of martyrs and for the Solemnity of Pentecost, which we celebrate today, because the Holy Spirit is 'fire' and 'blood'.

As the Acts of the Apostles recount in the first reading, the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles as *tongues of fire*, flames resting on each of them (Acts 2:3), because the Holy Spirit, like fire, purifies and strengthens!

The Holy Spirit, whom we received at Baptism, softens and shapes us as fire does steel, and if we abandon ourselves to His grace, He also purifies us as one refines silver and gold. But just as fire burns, so too the Spirit's work in us is at times painful, because we really do need to be purified. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to us the imperfections we carry, and then allow the fire of His grace to burn them away. And this is often painful, because it means letting go of things: it means letting go of our sins and changing our ways and our minds; in some cases, it means letting go of certain friends or activities; it means growing in faith and love. But the rewards are far greater than the pain! The more we're purified, the closer we get to Jesus, the more intimate we become with Him — and that's precisely what it's for!

As the silversmith melts ore in fire to burn away the impurities and reveal the beauty and value of the silver, so too the Spirit burns away our impurities so that our beauty and value as children of God is made more and more visible. But this process takes time. Like silver, we can't take the whole process of purification in one shot; it has to be carried out gradually, allowing the impurities to burn away at successive degrees, beginning first with the big stuff, and then with the smaller stuff.

But I'll warn you: the closer we get to Jesus, the more imperfections we notice in ourselves. But this shouldn't lead us to despair because it's a sign of progression, a sign that the process of perfection and growth is working! And as the silversmith knows that the silver is ready when he can see his own reflection in it, so too will the Holy Spirit have accomplished His work of purification when we perfectly reflect the image of Christ in our lives.

And that, my brothers and sisters, is the goal of the Christian life: to become the perfect image of Christ. And the role of the Holy Spirit is to purify us into living icons of Christ, and to strengthen us in that journey so that we might better and more joyfully reflect this image to all those around us. This is what we mean by 'holiness', and it's to this that each of us have been called by Baptism.

The goal of following Jesus is to become like Him: discipleship means imitation, and the Holy Spirit is the One who teaches us and helps us to imitate the Lord. That's why the He's 'fire'.

But the Holy Spirit is also blood. As flowing blood is the sign of life in the body, so is the Holy Spirit working in us the sign of spiritual life. And as blood is the bond between family members, so is the Holy Spirit the bond that unites us as members of the Church, brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

In Baptism, we received the gift of the Holy Spirit as the spiritual lifeblood of our relationship with God and with each other: we belong to God because His Spirit dwells in us, and we belong to each other because we share the same Spirit. This is renewed and strengthened in us through the Sacrament of Confirmation, where we're 'strengthened' — 'confirmation' means 'strengthening' — with the Holy Spirit for the prophetic role of service and mission to the world, because our sanctification in the fire of the Spirit isn't just for ourselves: it's also *with* and *for* others, those in the Church and those outside of her embrace.

This life in the Spirit is meant to be shared — and shared joyfully! The experience of being purified and strengthened by the Holy Spirit (in being sanctified) is Good News! And so, the life

we receive from the Holy Spirit is one of evangelisation and zeal: it's meant to send us out to the ends of the earth to proclaim the Good News and salvation of Jesus Christ: *Receive the Holy Spirit, as the Father sent me, so I send you* (Jn 20:22, 21). The Holy Spirit, my brothers and sisters, isn't a secret to be kept but a joy to be lived and shared!

My brothers and sisters, as we rejoice today in the Solemnity of Pentecost, may we abandon ourselves to the fire of the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to purify and strengthen us, to renew in us a share in His divine life, so that we might bring Jesus to all people, and all people to Jesus. Amen.

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*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.*

V. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

R. And you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.