

SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from Heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. ~ Acts 2:1-4

THE DAY OF PENTECOST and the events that occurred in the place where the apostles, together with Mary the Mother of Jesus, were gathered in prayer after the Ascension mark a significant moment in the history of the Church. It is the moment the Church can never forget, because it represents the public manifestation and acceptance of her birth — *both in and for the world* — through the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Although the birth of the Church is most accurately symbolized by the blood and water that flowed out from the open side of the crucified Jesus (see Jn 19:34), this birth was in many ways concealed from the apostles who, at the time of the crucifixion, were experiencing a profound fear and, in many ways, a serious crisis of faith. Yet, it was precisely on the cross that Christ gave birth to the Church, as he had ear-

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Pentecost, 6th century miniature from the Syriac Gospel of Rabula

lier foretold concerning his future suffering and death, saying: “*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself*” (Jn 12:32).

On the heels of the Resurrection and the Ascension, we find this origin of the Church made evident in a particularly decisive way and accepted *publicly* through the coming and power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is the “other” promised One, the “*other Counselor*” (Jn 14:16), the One whom Jesus prom-

ises will appear at the price of, and precisely because of, his own departure through the cross and Resurrection. “*Nevertheless I tell you the truth,*” Jesus told the disciples, “*it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you*” (Jn 16:7).

At Pentecost, the Church is publicly manifested, the “age of the Church” is begun, and the promises made by Jesus about the coming of the Holy Spir-



The Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome, the Cathedral of the Pope; the site has been the center of Christian life in Rome since the early 14th century; the present church's facade was completed in 1755

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it are fulfilled. It is for these reasons — and many more — that Pentecost is celebrated as a solemn feast (a “solemnity”) in the Church. On the fiftieth day after Easter, the Church recalls how the Holy Spirit descended upon those gathered in the Upper Room with all the power of a mighty windstorm in order to dwell forever in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple (see Acts 2:1-4; 1 Cor 3:16; 1 Cor 6:19). The Church also remembers that it is precisely the Holy Spirit who prays and bears witness to the fact that we are all adopted sons and daughters of God (see Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15-16, 26); and that it is he, the Counselor, the Comforter, and the Sanctifier, who guides the Church into the fullness of truth (see Jn 16:13) and gives her a unity of fellowship and service. Pentecost further reminds every Christian that it is the Spirit of God who furnishes and directs the Church with various gifts, above all the gift of himself, since as the Spirit of the Father and the Son, he

is also the love between them and is therefore the Trinitarian gift of divine love and the eternal source of every divine giving of gifts to creatures.

Thus, the Solemnity of Pentecost is more than a celebration of an event or even the “birthday” of the Church. Above all, it is the celebration of a Person who is both spirit and love. Pope John Paul II called him “*Person-Love*” and “*Person-Gift*” because in the Holy Spirit, the intimate life of the Triune God becomes *totally gift*. The Holy Spirit, therefore, is celebrated on Pentecost as the personal expression of God’s own infinite love and interpersonal self-giving. Finally, Pentecost reveals and its feast reminds us all that the Church is meant to be *catholic*, that is, universal, which is why, following the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit, the crowds heard the disciples telling of the mighty works of God in their own languages (see Acts 2:5-11).

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