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Pentecost Sunday, June 4, 2017

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Emitte spiritum tuum et creabuntur, et renovabis faciem terrae. Send forth thy spirit, and they shall be created: and thou shalt renew the face of the earth.*<sup>1</sup>

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,  
My very Dear Sons,

As you perhaps remember, when the prophet Elijah, fleeing the persecution of Jezabel, had come to Mount Horeb after a long walk through the desert, the word of the Lord came to him and a great revelation was given. While the prophet stood before God on the mountain, a strong wind that shook the whole earth around him shattering stones came up, but God was not in that wind and earthquake. Nor was He in the fire that followed. Then there came a whistling of gentle air, and Elijah covered his face with his mantle, for the presence of God was in that gentle breeze.<sup>2</sup>

On the morning of Pentecost, on the contrary, most mysteriously it was not in a gentle breeze, but in a mighty wind coming, one that filled the house where the Disciples were gathered, that was found the presence of God, that is to say of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit Himself. Tongues of fire as it were appeared as well, sitting upon each one of them, “and they began to speak with diverse tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak.”<sup>3</sup> In the case of Elijah, God was neither in the wind nor in the fire; but for the Holy Apostles gathered around their Queen, on the contrary, He was both in the mighty wind and in the marvelous fire. What does this mean?

God is the Creator of the world. Sending forth His Spirit he creates all things and He renews the face of the earth. In His infinite Wisdom He assigns to each thing its true measure, as we can read in the Book of Wisdom: “But thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight.”<sup>4</sup> What begins in the silence and stillness of contemplation breaks forth later, according to the Divine plan, in the boldness of the Word of God transmitted to the entire world. The gentle breeze of contemplation comes first; the great wind of the preaching of the Gospel comes after. There is no contradiction, but rather two phases of a same plan. After days of recollected prayer (the first phase), Our Lady and the disciples were suddenly seized with the strength of the Holy Ghost, allowing those designated to go out and preach the Gospel to the entire universe, baptizing them all in the name of the Holy Trinity (second phase). So, the two things are not contradictory: the intimate communication of God to the soul in silent prayer is not something separate from the bold transmission of the Word of God, but prepares for it. It was at the silent scene of the Annunciation that the entire earthly career of the Word-made-Flesh was inaugurated. It was Mary’s contemplation that first received the Gospel. Later, after the

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. 103: 30 (Douay –Reims).

<sup>2</sup> Cf 3 Kings 19.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 2.

<sup>4</sup> Wisdom 11:21

Pentecost, it was also by her prayer that she held up the first steps of the Church. As a well-known historian of the Church writes so aptly:

[Mary] sustained the newborn Church by the power of her contemplation and of her love. She was of even more use to the Church than were the Apostles who acted outwardly. She was the hidden root in which was secreted the sap that was to burst into flower and fruit. She did not bear the keys of the Kingdom, but by her prayer she guided and sustained those who bore them...<sup>5</sup>

Today, on this glorious feast of the Pentecost, we consider that great coming of the Holy Spirit over the first disciples and the spectacular beginning of the outward expansion of the Church. Who then would have thought, in human terms, that from this small group of Jews would come the billion plus membership of those who now belong to belong to the Communion of the Holy Catholic Church, to which must be added in various manners the other Christian denominations? It is a surprising story. The hand of God is clearly here. Even though in some parts of the world the Church seems to be losing ground rapidly where Christians give in more and more to a secular spirit, in other regions martyrs by the hundreds are sowing in their blood the seed of Christianity to come. Nothing can stop this impetuous spiritual wind of the Holy Ghost.

Also, while the most usual means for spreading the Gospel has been by means of the preaching confided mainly to priests, God, in that infinite wisdom mentioned earlier, by which He orders all things in measure, number, and weight, provided for other means for the Church to grow. One very fruitful means has been the monastic life. Without engaging in much preaching, monks bring the message of the Church to whole civilizations—they even create whole civilizations, simply by being what they are, by pointing the way to Heaven without so many words, like the fingers of two hands joined in prayer, as one abbot so aptly put it.

Here in Oklahoma, where the wind comes sweeping down the countryside (sometimes destroying a good bit of it) with such strength, we monks would hope to see a spiritual renewal take place like the one that started in the Upper Room and moved out to conquer, not by pride, but by humility, the entire world. Or rather, we would like our own little part of this story to continue, stemming from the gentle breeze of contemplation, but continuing to reach out to souls all around.

The Church has sometimes been likened to a great ship, a sailing vessel, moved by the Holy Spirit of God, that great divine wind that fills her sails, toward the safe port of eternity. The sailing is often rough, however, as an angry sea threatens from time to time to destroy this ship with a strong gale. But the Cross, the holy Cross of Christ, is the mast of this ship, and she has at her helm Saint Peter, whose faith the Lord promised to uphold, even as Satan has desired to sift him as wheat.<sup>6</sup> May we hold fast to the promises of Our Lord and trust in the protection of the Mother of God, who is Mother of the Church, the ambassador from Heaven to Fatima, who protects this unique ship from all evil, despite all storms that may come along upon the sea of human history. Amen. Alleluia.

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<sup>5</sup> Cardinal Charles Journet, *The Church of the Incarnate Word*, Volume 1, Chapter 9, number 8.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 22:31.