

+ WHITSUNDAY

Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 2020

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

And when the days of the Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together in one place: And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them: And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with diverse tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak.¹

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

“Some say the world will end in fire, Some say in ice,” wrote an English poet.² Another mused, “This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper.”³ Following a world-wide lock-down for reasons both obvious and yet not entirely clear, a damaged humanity is now wondering whether the world has not already ended. But the Church continues her earthly pilgrimage, to walk through fire and ice toward the fulfillment of a great destiny. It is the Holy Spirit that animates her with tongues of spiritual fire and prophetic words in the face of the rulers of this world, who would shut her in.

In fact, it is rather with fire than ice—certainly not with a whimper—that Holy Church proclaims the message, and also with wind, with spirit, with the Holy Spirit. The prophet Ezekiel describes the four living creatures of his strange vision, the same four living creatures associated by Christians with the four Gospels, as being pushed forward by the spirit. “There was the face of a man, and the face of a lion on the right side of all the four: and the face of an ox, on the left side...and the face of an eagle over all the four...whither the impulse of the spirit was to go, thither they went.”⁴ Like these four living creatures of the prophecy, the Holy Church moves forward along the path of history, impelled, not by the powers that be, by “the rulers of the world of this darkness,” as Saint Paul calls them,⁵ but by the life-giving Spirit of God, which in the Holy Trinity is the Third Person, the one whose name is Love. “The name Love in God,” writes Saint Thomas Aquinas, “can be taken essentially and personally. If taken personally it is the proper name of the Holy Ghost; as Word is the proper name of the Son.”⁶ “The Holy Ghost Himself is Love,” says Pope Saint Gregory the Great with bold simplicity.⁷

One terrible temptation for the Church, that is to say for the human members of the Church, is to fall into the attraction of worldliness. This is how the impetus of the wind, the spirit of God, gets thwarted and the mission to baptize all the peoples of the world, according to the Lord’s mandate, becomes impaired. In a recent interview Cardinal Sarah brought home this very point:

¹ Acts 2:1-4.

² Poem of Robert Frost, “Fire and Ice.”

³ T. S. Eliot, *The Hollow Men*.

⁴ Ezekiel 1:10, 12.

⁵ Ephesians 6:12.

⁶ *Summa*, Pars Ia, Q. 37, art. 1.

⁷ Homily 30 for Pentecost.

The Church has committed herself to the struggle for a better world. She has been right to support ecology, peace, dialogue, solidarity, and the equitable distribution of wealth. All these struggles are just. But they could make us forget the words of Jesus: ‘My kingdom is not of this world.’ The COVID-19 epidemic has laid bare an insidious disease that [has been] eating away at the Church: she thought that she was ‘of this world.’⁸

So, how does the Church keep moving forward to convert the entire world in the current context, without being of this world? How does she advance through fire and ice, without fear? According to Pope Francis,

The Holy Spirit works as he wills, when he wills and where he wills; we entrust ourselves without pretending to see striking results. We know only that our commitment is necessary. Let us learn to rest in the tenderness of the arms of the Father amid our creative and generous commitment. Let us keep marching forward; let us give him everything, allowing him to make our efforts bear fruit in his good time.⁹

As we all know who live in or around Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey, the mode chosen by the black monks is that of the contemplative life, with a special emphasis on the sacred Liturgy. Though monks occasionally go out into the world, our usual manner of life is to remain hidden inside the cloister, receiving with Christian hospitality all those who wish to come visit us and thus benefit from the peace of the monastic order. It is a wonderful order of things—of all things—centered on the Person of Christ.

In a few weeks we are expecting the completion of a great Catholic Christian work of art, a parable in stone, that of the tympanum above the front door of our church under construction. Sometime in the not-too-distant future the scaffolding that has hidden the artist’s endeavors will fall away, and we will contemplate the Lord in glory, surrounded by the four living creatures mentioned above, the ones who move mysteriously forward in the Spirit of God. May this precious work of art inspire all those who will walk beneath it into the great portal of our abbatial church, with the love of God and the love of the Church.

Those who enter the church will also see inscribed in stone the life of the Blessed Virgin, the spouse of the Holy Spirit, the Mother of Christ and of His Church, accompanied by the Holy Apostles. May she, who is according to the expression of Pope Saint John Paul II, the “star of the New Evangelization,” keep us on the true path of holiness, ever moving forward in the Spirit of God until we enter the portal of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Amen. Alleluia.

⁸ *Figaro* op-ed, May 20, 2020.

⁹ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 279.