

+ WHITSUNDAY

Pentecost Sunday, May 23, 2021

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.

*Veni, Sancte Spiritus, / Et emitte coelitus / Lucis tuae radium. Come, O Holy Spirit, come; / And from thy celestial home / Shed a ray of light divine.*¹

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

In our time of no small social upheaval and spiritual confusion, the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's special gift to us, is all the more precious. Saint Charles Borromeo tells us how to prepare our souls for this incomparable gift. Let us listen to him attentively:

Since great kings and princes planning a stay in someone's house are accustomed to send ahead servants who furnish it with tapestries and draperies, in a similar way, my children, humbly beseech the Son of God today, that he may send His Holy Spirit into you. That he who is ready to do this, may do it more willingly, dedicate yourselves to him this day as altars, offer yourselves as tabernacles when he is placed in your mouth. No palace delights him as much as your hearts. Christ the Lord will come to you, surrounded by thousands of cohorts of angels, to feed you and nourish you with his flesh.²

With the same Saint, however, we have to admit with confusion, how, in former times our souls were more like "dens of serpents and demons, utterly disgusting sewers of sin."³ Also, given the rather dramatic failure of the teaching of the catechism in our day, it is greatly to be feared that the terrible state of sin described by the saintly bishop is what the souls of all too many Catholics and Christians of other denominations resemble even now. No wonder our country is coming apart at the seams! What is to be done?

In a certain manner the current crisis is a crisis of our leaders, both in the secular and, especially, in the religious sphere. We read in the prophet Hosea, *And there shall be like people like priest.*⁴ If the bishop or priest goes astray, so will the flock. Pope Saint Gregory the Great offers precious advice in this matter:

And this indeed the prophet Jeremiah, in the great sorrow of his charity, deploras under the image of the destruction of the temple, saying, *How is the gold become dim! The most excellent color is changed; the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of all the streets.*⁵ For what is expressed by gold, which surpasses all other metals, but the excellency of holiness? What by the most excellent color but the reverence that is about religion, to all men lovely? What are signified by the stones of the sanctuary but persons in sacred orders? What is figured under the name of streets but the latitude of this present life? For, because in Greek speech the word for latitude is *πλάτος*, streets (*plateæ*) have

¹ Sequence of the Mass of Pentecost.

² Charles Borromeo: *Selected Orations, Homilies and Writings* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 79-80.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Hosea 4:9.

⁵ Lamentations 4:1

been so called from their breadth, or latitude. But the Truth in person says, *Broad and spacious is the way that leads to destruction*.⁶ Gold, therefore, becomes dim when a life of holiness is polluted by earthly doings; the most excellent color is changed, when the previous reputation of persons who were believed to be living religiously is diminished. For, when any one after a habit of holiness mixes himself up with earthly doings, it is as though his color were changed, and the reverence that surrounded him grew pale and disregarded before the eyes of men. The stones of the sanctuary also are poured out into the streets, when those who, for the ornament of the Church, should have been free to penetrate internal mysteries as it were in the secret places of the tabernacle seek out the broadways of secular causes outside.⁷

However, it is the simple faithful too, who are responsible. It is all of us who can help a bishop, a priest, or even a monk, to remain focused on the essential thing, on the *unum necessarium* to which our Lord directed the overly active Saint Martha in the Gospel, in contrast to her sister Mary, who had chosen the better part of contemplation at the Master's feet.⁸ You, the simple faithful, together with the monks, must fill up your own cup with the holiness that comes from the Holy Ghost, before sharing from that fullness with men and women dedicated to God, so that we all remain faithful and not let the gold become tarnished or restore its shine where necessary, so that they will have the courage to push back courageously against the many evils that are polluting whole societies. It is thus that our Holy Catholic Church will resemble again, in its ministers and its faithful, the beauty of the Queen of which the Cantic of Canticles speaks. Here is one more quote from Saint Charles Borromeo, in which the work of the Holy Spirit in the ministers of the Church is explained:

O how much those words of David apply to this vast Spouse and Church of Christ: *The queen stood on your right hand, in gilded clothing; surrounded with variety*,⁹ so filled with treasures, so endowed with the gifts, the graces and the most holy Sacraments of the Holy Spirit, embellished with such a great multitude of porters, lectors, exorcists, acolytes, subdeacons, deacons, priests, and bishops, with so many outstanding dignities, so many illustrious offices and functions. ...Great indeed is the ornate beauty of this queen, the beauty of this variety of orders.¹⁰

May the Queen of Heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary, who stands at the right hand of her Son, together with Saint Joseph and all the Holy Angels and Saints, teach us ever more, every day, to welcome the Holy Spirit of God, the same Spirit, who at the beginning of the world, hovered over the waters as the Divine, life-giving breath of creation. *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*. Amen. Alleluia.

⁶ Matthew 7:13.

⁷ Saint Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Rule*, Book II, Chapter 7.

⁸ Cf. Luke 10:41-43.

⁹ Psalm 44:10.

¹⁰ Charles Borromeo, pp. 117-118.