

# + WHITSUNDAY

## Pentecost Sunday 2023

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 Ghost. Amen.

*[If I by the finger of God cast out devils, doubtless the kingdom of God is come upon you. (Lk. 11:20)*

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

On this Sunday, called Pentecost or Whitsunday, that marks the fiftieth day of the Easter season, we commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and Disciples of the Lord, gathered around the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Upper Room of Jerusalem. The Book of Acts recounts the episode.

And when the days of the Pentecost were accomplished, they all were 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... (Actes 2:1-4)

Better yet, we not only commemorate the scene, but according to the measure of our faith, we live this scene, we enter into the mystery, we participate in the Pentecost, since it is not simply an historical event, but a mystery of God, a reality that somehow escapes the confines of space and time. We are with the Apostles and their Queen in the Upper Room. Such is the power of God that we can be transported to that Upper Room. Such is the power of the Holy Spirit that it can work wonders right here and now, as it did at the first Pentecost. We only lose this power through sin. (If you do not have the Holy Spirit in your life, you need to go to Confession and recapture it.)

The Lord Himself used that power of the Holy Spirit. One day, as he was casting out a spirit that had made a man mute, critics in the crowd started to say that it was by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, that Jesus cast this one out. In reply Christ uttered these memorable words, "If it is by Beelzebub that I cast out devils, by whom do your [own] children cast them out?... But if it is through the finger of God that I cast out devils, then know that the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Lk. 11:19-20). Interestingly enough, in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew Christ says, "But if it is through the *Spirit of God* that I cast out devils..." (Mt. 12:28). By comparing the two texts we see that, for Jesus, the expression "the finger of God" is the equivalent of "the Spirit of God."

Now it was "with the finger of God," according to the Book of Exodus, that the Ten Commandments were written on the stone tablets given to Moses (cf. Ex. 31:18). Saint Ambrose speaks about this in relation to the New Law that is brought to man by Christ. It is this New Law that is "promulgated" at Pentecost. The holy doctor explains:

With this Finger, as we read, God wrote on those tables of stone which Moses received. For God did not with a finger of flesh write the forms and portions of those letters which we read, but gave the law by His Spirit. And so the Apostle says: “For the Law is spiritual, which, indeed, is written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but on fleshy tables of the heart.” (2 Cor. 3:3) For if the letter of the Apostle is written in the Spirit, what hinders us from believing that the Law of God was written not with ink, but with the Spirit of God, which certainly does not stain but enlightens the secret places of our heart and mind? (in Lucam)

The point is that the New Law, brought by Christ, although it does not contradict the Old Law, shows itself to be incomparably superior to it. The New Law, according to Saint Thomas Aquinas, is the very grace of the Holy Spirit. This is a most wonderful intuition. The power of God is the Finger of God, which is the Holy Spirit that operates since Pentecost in a powerful way in order to transform the entire world. The Old Law was written on stone tablets; the New Law is written on our hearts with this finger of spiritual fire. The Old Law was like the water at the wedding feast of Cana; the New Law like the miraculous wine, the messianic wine.

But how does this work? What happens in our hearts when the Finger of God writes the New Law there? Well, the first Christians immediately began to experience what we call charismatic gifts or graces. They spoke in tongues, uttered prophecies, performed healings and many other wonderful signs. Saint Paul goes into much detail about this Chapter 12 of his first Epistle to the Corinthians. Along the centuries this has continued. Saint Benedict possessed many charismatic and miraculous gifts from the Holy Ghost, as his biography by Saint Gregory the Great attests. Saints in our own time too have displayed these outward gifts, for example Saint Padre Pio.

But there is more—much more. Saint Paul, after enumerating an impressive list of charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit says this:

Be ambitious for the higher gifts. And I am going to show you a way that is better than any of them [the charismatic gifts]. If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are, and knowing everything, and if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains, but without love, then I am nothing at all. (I Cor. 12:31-13:2)

What he is saying is that those more hidden, spiritual graces that foster a deeper prayer “in spirit and in truth,” and which belong to every person enjoying sanctifying grace, are superior even to the extraordinary graces that produce miracles. The power of the Holy Ghost present in our theological life of Faith, Hope and Charity (especially Charity) surpasses that of charismatic manifestations. The Blessed Virgin, who was the holiest of all Christ’s faithful, is not known to have exercised any particular charismatic gifts after Pentecost. Sanctity will consist, not much in miraculous manifestations, but rather in theological graces. Sanctity will consist, not so much in doing extraordinary actions such as miraculous cures, but in having Faith, Hope and Charity to an *extraordinary* degree.

With this abundance of the theological virtues comes an increase as well in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, those spiritual “sails” that let us capture the Holy Breath of God and be propelled toward the Heavenly Port of the City of God.

So let us be zealous, ambitious for these higher gifts. “If we desire to be on fire with the love of God,” explains St. Alphonsus, “we must delight in prayer; this is the blessed furnace in which this divine ardor is enkindled.” Then will we be truly spiritual men and women. Then will we realize the purpose for which God created us and led us through Holy Baptism into the one true Church. Then will the “finger of God,” the finger of holy love, be upon us; then will the Kingdom of God be at hand.

Veni Sancte Spiritus. Amen. Alleluia.