

May 31, 2020 St. Augustine Cathedral (Livestreamed) 11:30 a.m.

Solemnity of Pentecost

First of all, I want to say how good it is to see you who are here. It's so good to NOT celebrate Mass in an empty church. It's a relief---a sense that we're making some progress---- to be able to come together, especially on this great and solemn Feast of Pentecost, and to be able to share in the actual reception of the precious Gift of the Eucharist, from Whom you have all been separated for more than 3 months. But I also want to say that I'm still very happy and pleased to celebrate with all of you who are joining us virtually through the "livestreaming" of this Mass. Many of you, including most of my dear Family and some dear Friends, have become regular and faithful participants of our "livestreamed" weekly Masses, and I'm very pleased to have all of you participating in this virtual way.

These have been 3 challenging months. We have lived through a worldwide pandemic which has caused sickness and death, anxiety and fear, and untold hardship for individuals, families and communities throughout the world. We know it's not over; the adjustments that we have to make will continue for some time to come. But we have "weathered this storm", and for that, I know we all give thanks to God. At the same time, we all grieve over the tragic loss of human lives---- 362,000 worldwide; just over 100,000 in our own country; and 5,643---- here in our own State. There have been other losses as well----economic losses; employment losses; the missing out of special life moments that had to be changed, cancelled or postponed from First Communions, Graduations, Proms, Weddings, Parties, Sports and even Concerts. Life changed dramatically in these 3 months.

On the other hand, we are now more grateful for the precious gift of life; we stopped taking people for granted; we rediscovered the value of family time, and enjoying one another's company and support; we valued many in our lives in ways never before those on the "front lines" who are truly "essential" to our well-being: health care workers---doctors, nurses,

technicians, EMTs; safety and security officers; teachers who stepped up and hardly missed a beat in keeping our children on track with their education in a totally different way for teachers and students; and of course grocery, sanitation, and municipal workers. I pray that as we return to normal, that we don't forget what we have learned, that we don't once more begin to take for granted all that is so precious to us in our lives, including the practice of our Faith and the Gift of the Eucharist.

With all that being said, it is particularly disturbing to have seen the senseless killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis earlier this week, and the equally senseless epidemic of violence, riots, looting, destruction, and hatred that has spread to major cities across the country as the clear result of racism and the unjust taking of a human life. As I said in my public statement yesterday: *"I urge all our Parish communities to pray fervently this weekend for God's graces to strengthen our resolve to live together as His children, made in His image and likeness, with profound respect for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, and with a strong commitment to live together in His Peace."*

So, I say all that, because it seems clear to me that as we celebrate this great Feast of Pentecost in this troubled time, we desperately need the Holy Spirit and His amazing, life-renewing Gifts.

Today's First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles recounted the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, huddled together in fear in the Upper Room. We heard that the Powerful Holy Spirit passed through locked doors, closed windows, and frightened hearts. As St. Luke described it, *"there was a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were, and there appeared tongues as of fire which parted and came to rest on each one of them."* Noise---Wind---Fire----almost like a tornado. And St. Luke concludes: *"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim."* A miracle of unity resulted from the coming of the Holy Spirit Who drew out of them their fear, doubt, worry, anxiety, sense of inadequacy, and filled them up with

the Spirit's seven-fold Gifts of Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Courage, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord.

Now, more than ever, we need these Gifts so that we can be strong in our Faith, so we can be renewed in our Love for Jesus, be zealous in our witness to Gospel values in our society; we need these Gifts to help us advance scientific research to fight against deadly viruses that cause so much sickness and death; we need these Gifts to give us the courage to denounce racism and violence, to eradicate social injustice and all that disrespects human life.

We need Wisdom to make choices that are right and just, and not just expedient or convenient. We need Understanding to clearly see the Truth in the midst of so much misinformation, distortion and spun, slanted facts. We need Counsel to make sure we never lose Hope in the Gospel of Jesus, and to guard against the discouragement and sadness that tempts us toward depression, or to see the proverbial glass as only half-empty. We need the Gift of Courage----the Gift that Pope Francis likes to talk about so often as "*Coraggio*"----so that we can stand strong in the face of so many relational, societal, political, and cultural problems we face every day; that we can know with certainty that we have the entire Communion of the Saints cheering us on from their Heavenly Home. We need the Gift of Knowledge to help us to acknowledge the dignity of every person regardless of race, creed, economic or social status. We need the Gift of Piety to deepen our relationship with God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit-- --a relationship that we desperately need to keep us focused on our journey of Faith; we also need that Gift to help us turn to Mary, the Mother of the Church, to inspire us to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our Neighbor as Jesus loves us. And finally, we need the powerful Gift of the Fear of the Lord, or as we also sometimes refer to it as the Gift of Wonder and Awe. We all know those special moments---- when we see a gorgeous sunset, or a beautiful rainbow, or a new-born Baby----and we are left speechless---all we can do is say: "Wow"---or "Oh my!" That's the Gift that we need---- to be able to see God's Hand in all the majesty and wonder of His amazing creation of this world in which we live, as well as in the

depth of God's unconditional and merciful Love for us---and say: "*How great is our God!*"! It is only by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit that we are able to live our lives in this world as faithful, and joyful, disciples of Jesus Christ.

We heard about another transmission of the Holy Spirit this morning---a mini Pentecost, if you will. It was in our Gospel Reading just a few moments ago. It was a much less flamboyant demonstration----no noise, wind, or flames, like we heard in the Acts of the Apostles' account on the first Pentecost. But it was dramatic, and it was certainly powerful. It was Jesus----Risen from the Dead! It doesn't get much more powerful than that. And it was the Risen Jesus, passing right through locked doors and walls, yet in a Body which still had the nail holes in His hands and feet, and the gaping wound in His side, that were able to be touched---it doesn't get much more dramatic than that. To the troubled, frightened Apostles, Jesus simply said: *Peace be with you.*" And then, Jesus did what He had promised He would do: He gave them the Gift of the Holy Spirit---just by breathing on them. And this Holy Spirit empowered them to act in His Name, to bring forgiveness for sins, to share His love and mercy with all people, to work for unity, and to show the world how to live in His Peace.

Yes, we are living in challenging times. But so were the days when Jesus suffered, died, rose to New Life, and ascended back to Heaven so that He could send His Holy Spirit to be with us always; those days when the Holy Spirit filled the Apostles with His powerful Gifts; and the days when the Apostles began to preach the Gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth. They weren't easy days; in fact they were filled with constant problems, great suffering, terrible persecutions, and thousands of martyrdoms. So too----here in our day, we also have our own problems to overcome, and challenges to face. But, guess what----we have the same, powerful, Gift-bestowing, life-giving Holy Spirit as the Apostles did. The question is: are we willing to open our fearful and anxious hearts, and allow that same Spirit to set us on fire with His Love, as He was able to do for them?

That's what it takes---a willingness for each of us to be **renewed**; to be spiritually renewed; to renew our Faith; to renew our relationship with Jesus; to renew our Baptismal Resolutions and Confirmation promises; to be willing to use those Gifts of the Holy Spirit to help us begin to renew the world, or at least the part of the world where we live. And if you did that, and I did that, and all of us here did that, and all of you virtually present did that---if our Diocese did that; well, that would make **all** the difference in the world.

Let us make today's Psalm Response our fervent prayer, but with one small, but important, modification: "*Lord, send out Your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth---beginning with me, and with you---so that, as we heard St. Paul tell us in our Second Reading today, we can say with all our hearts, in the Holy Spirit: Jesus Christ is Lord!*"

Come, Holy Spirit, come!