

“Send forth Thy Spirit, and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.”

Ps 103:30

With the passing of one Pope this Eastertide and the election of another, the eyes of the Church and of the world have been focused on Rome, the Eternal City. It is there that the heart of the Catholic Church beats. One way or another, the whole Catholic world makes its way to Rome, either literally – especially on pilgrimage during a Holy Year – or as Catholics lift up their heads in affection, just as the People of Israel turned their hearts and their minds to the Temple in Jerusalem. It is to Rome that Catholics look for guidance and teaching. It is to Rome that Catholics look for the good governance and leadership of their global family. It is to Rome that Catholics look for the earthly well-spring of all heavenly graces that flow through the Mass and the Sacraments, given to us by the Church Herself.

Today, especially, we look to Rome insofar as the feast of Pentecost is the birthday of the Church; the day on which the Kingdom of God on earth was brought to birth by the power of the Holy Spirit, just as the creation of the world was brought forth by the breath of God in the Book of Genesis.

Pentecost marks a new creation in the order of grace, a bursting forth of energy and life, and of a holiness that purifies through the burning tongues of fire that came down upon the heads of those Apostles charged with continuing the work that Our Lord had already begun.

‘I will not leave you orphans,’ Our Lord had promised (Jn 14:18). Now, by giving the Apostles the sacramental power to baptize, Our Lord was giving His heavenly Father to be our Father also. The supernatural reality of this fatherhood – of this guardianship of our souls – is made symbolically present for us in the person of one whom, through

heartfelt devotion, we call *papa*, Pope. Our Holy Father in Rome is charged by God to oversee the continuation in time of the work begun by His Son two thousand years ago.

Christ is the head and the Church is His Mystical Body, as St Paul tells us elsewhere (Col 1:18). Just as you and I have a soul that is invisible and a body that is tangible, so, too, the Church has a hidden supernatural life and, at the same time, a visible and physical presence in the form of an institutional structure.

The Catholic Church – the Mystical Body of Christ – is the very real presence of Christ Himself, and the continuation in time and down the ages of His personal presence on earth two millennia ago.

This is why we Catholics do more than just follow the lead of the Pope; this is why we do more than attend to the duties and responsibilities that the Catholic Church lays upon us at our baptism; this is why we do more than just pay attention to what the Catholic Church teaches. This is why Catholics actually *venerate* the Catholic Church: She *is* the presence of Christ among us, and we treat Her as we would treat Our Lord were He to appear before us in physical form, just as He appeared to His disciples following His resurrection from the dead.

This is what the feast of Pentecost is about: the making present here on earth of the Son of God in such a way that His work, begun so long ago, may be continued through all the generations of human history until the close of time. This is what Our Lord meant at the beginning of the Gospel when He said that ‘the kingdom of God is at hand’ (Mk 1:15). The Catholic Church *is* the Kingdom of God upon earth.

Oh, we know well enough that the Church is filled with sinners who do Her harm. Sadly, you and I are among them, for each sin we commit, be each one ever so small, serves to diminish the glory of the Kingdom of God on earth. Nonetheless, the Church is also peopled with saints who build up that same glory through their merits, just as we can

contribute to the glory of God's Kingdom on earth through our acts of virtue, and penance, and sacrifice. It is as Our Lord said it would be, a field sown with both wheat and chaff that grow side by side, and which will not be separated out until the harvest at the end of time (Mt 13:24-30).

For all the very real stains on the face of the Church today, still the inner, supernatural reality of God's Kingdom remains greater than the sum of Her parts, breathing forth a holiness that is – and again it is St Paul who says it – without 'spot or wrinkle... or blemish' of any kind (Eph 5:27).

Just as our eyes have been turned towards Rome in recent weeks – and we have been reminded of the universal nature of the Catholic Church – so today, on the feast of Pentecost, Her birthday, we look to the sublime renewal once again of all that is holy in God's creation through the yearly outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful,
and enkindle in them the fire of Thy love.
Send forth Thy Spirit,
and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.*