

Pentecost Sunday

May 19, 2013 (9:00a SVdP; 12:00pm, 5:00 p.m.)

Readings: Acts 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 12:3-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23

Looking back upon my life, there are a few moments that have stood out with respect to gaining a profound sense of power and authority, equally exhilarating and equally scary. Rising to the top of my list was the day I received my Driver's License shortly after my 16th birthday. I had passed both the written and the Drivers exam, and received a piece of paper enabling me to drive by myself for the very first time. I was mildly disappointed because it was not even laminated, but I knew it was temporary, and soon enough the real deal would be mailed to me.

But just as quickly, my exhilaration turned to fear as I drove to a high school football game the next evening. It turned to fear because I suddenly realized that all my practice driving had been during the day and the oncoming traffic with its glaring headlights really threw me for awhile. The full realization of this power became apparent, for not just my safety, but the lives of others were suddenly on my radar. Power came with responsibility, and there was little room for error.

Fear and exhilaration...I use this illustration by way of example because I do not see it as unusual that a mixture of emotions can be at play in the very same person, even at the very same time. The apostles must have felt a similar mixture of fear and power. They spoke in different tongues, in what could only be an amazing experience. And yet, in the Gospel, hearkening back 50 days, we are told that they were behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. But even there too, they were overpowered by the Holy Spirit- "Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you forgive..." Thus, the Solemnity of Pentecost is a powerful reminder of the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

In the Old Testament, the *ruah Yahweh*, lit. the “breath” of the Lord, descended upon leaders at the time of their anointing, and then on those chosen as prophets by the Lord. Prophets were called by God, sometimes unwillingly, but given the special graces to fulfill their roles in accordance with the will of God. The gift of the Spirit was later extended to the whole chosen people of God as a gift promised for the day of the Lord (cf. Joel 3:1 ff.)

For us today, so many centuries later, the meaning of Pentecost remains vital and empowering for all of us, working together, each according to our state in life. This forms the basis for “the supernatural appreciation of faith (*sensus fidei*) on the part of the whole people, when, from the bishops to the last of the faithful, they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals.”¹

This is why the task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him. Far from diminishing my role or yours, it situates it within the living body of Christ. While the pastors of the Church are specially aided by the Holy Spirit, none of us is lacking in guidance from above.

Our Catholic faith teaches that this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. “At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully.”² Let us pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon both our leaders and upon all the faithful. Through Confirmation, we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit to guide and protect us, to empower us to be faithful and string witnesses in the world. May the Holy Spirit continue to enlighten the hearts and minds of all of God’s people.

¹ Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium* 12; cf. St. Augustine, *De praed. sanct.* 14,27

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraph #86.