

The Church's Birthday Gives Us One Great Gift

This weekend on the Feast of Pentecost, we celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles who now begin their mission fully empowered with the Holy Spirit to help them. After receiving the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, the apostles went out and preached Jesus' message to everyone, even those who spoke other languages.

Most of us celebrate a birthday with a cake and getting some gifts for loved ones. But on Pentecost, we are the ones who are given an incredible gift in the Church. Sometimes though people don't open the gift up, or realize what a great gift the Church is.

A great way to celebrate Pentecost is to think about for a moment all the Church offers, and to take our role seriously too in growing within the Church and also realizing as part of it, our mission is evangelize the world.

So why do we need the Church?

For starters, the sacraments. The sacraments are visible signs of God in the world. The Church administers them as a way to help us grow in holiness and grow closer to God. This is why we come to Mass; not to be entertained, but to have our faith deepened. To encounter Jesus in the the Eucharist so we can welcome Him into our hearts and receive strength to turn away from sin and grow closer to Him. To receive the healing comfort of God's love through anointing of the sick when we are hurting; to be empowered by the Holy Spirit when we affirm our faith on our confirmation; and to receive God's mercy in confession, and strength as we discern our vocation which may include a calling to marriage or priesthood. The Church through the sacraments brings us closer to God, and that's why Mass is so important - it's not as if God needs us to tell him how great He is why we go to Mass. It's so we can get that strength. So make Mass a priority in your life, along with prayer. If you're traveling this summer and have access to a vehicle, find a Mass time if you are gone over a weekend. The sacraments give us so much strength and are such a wonderful gift God gives us.

The Church is also there to guide us too. This is why She teaches on matters of faith and morals, and why there is a catechism. The Holy Spirit continually guides the Church as well and enlightens her, which is why our understanding of the faith increases over time, as world situations can also change too. Odds are there may be some things in the faith that challenge you. Or you may see social media blow up in "outrage" over the comments a bishop or Church leader makes that are "against the times." But the Church isn't here to win popularity contests or tell people what they want to hear; the Church tells us what we need to hear. It's why at times She takes an unpopular position over the centuries from taking a stand against racism, to abortion and birth control to marriage and immigration. Odds are no matter where you are on the political spectrum or what your views are, there's something the Church teaches that will challenge you, and that's a good thing. So don't just go with what you hear on a soundbite or short news article if there's something "controversial" - rather study what the Church teaches

on it and why, and pray about it and engage the issue realizing the Church wants to help create saints and people make good decisions.

Lastly, remember you and I have a big role in that too. Pentecost celebrates the Holy Spirit coming upon the apostles who immediately go out and proclaim the Gospel. Through our baptism and confirmation, we, too, share in that mission. At a daily Mass last week, our Gospel was from John 16 where we read in verse 33 "In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world." A pretty timely verse. Many of the things we do as Christians can be counter-cultural in a world that says do whatever you want and all things are relative. When we hold to moral absolutes, or try to engage in discussion on our faith, some people can react with anger and hostility, or vilify us, and this can cause us to maybe be afraid. Or it can be tempting too to give up when we have that friend or family member who perhaps has no interest in the faith or has fallen away. Remember, the apostles don't stay in the locked room. And they don't have a ton of success right away - many of them are killed for the faith. But they persevere. And we must be willing to put up with criticism, with being judged and labeled too for the sake of the Gospel because when we do so, over the long haul, we can truly reach people.

The Church is indeed such a great gift. Made up of humans, all of us share in sin and sometimes even Church leaders will let us down and there will be a public scandal. When these things happen, we must confront them and learn from them, but not hang our heads in shame but be a people of hope. But through all that has happened over the centuries, the Church still stands strong because the Holy Spirit is guiding Her, and together God and His Church help us on our journey to heaven. What a great gift to celebrate and receive by being an active Christian.

Have a blessed Pentecost!

Fr. Paul