

A New Pentecost for a New Evangelization Rome 2017

Ralph Martin, S.T.D.

Main Points, Key Quotes

I. The Persistent Papal Calls for a New Pentecost

- John XXIII “Renew your wonders in our day as by a New Pentecost.”
- Paul VI

John Paul II: More than once we have asked ourselves what the greatest needs of the Church are . . . what is the primary and ultimate need of our beloved and holy Church? We must say it with holy fear because as you know, this concerns the mystery of the Church, her life: this need is the Spirit . . . the Church needs her eternal Pentecost; she needs fire in her heart, words on her lips, a glance that is prophetic.¹

Even in countries evangelized many centuries ago, the reality of a ‘Christian society’ which, amid all the frailties which have always marked human life, measured itself explicitly on Gospel values, is now gone. Today we must courageously face a situation which is becoming increasingly diversified and demanding, in the context of ‘globalization’ and of the consequent new and uncertain mingling of peoples and cultures. Over the years, I have often repeated the summons to the new evangelization. I do so again now, especially in order to insist that we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardour of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost. We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul, who cried out: ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel. (NMI, 40)

Benedict XVI: The missionary mandate accompanies us into the Third Millennium and urges us to share the enthusiasm of the very first Christians: we can count on the power of the same Spirit who was poured out at Pentecost and who impels us still today to start out anew, sustained by the hope ‘which does not disappoint.’ (Rom 5:5) (NMI, 58)

In the exercise of my ministry as the Successor of Peter, I have come to America to confirm you, my brothers and sisters, in the faith of the Apostles (cf. Lk 22:32). I have come to proclaim anew, as Peter proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, that Jesus Christ is Lord and Messiah, risen from the dead, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father, and established as judge of the living and the dead (cf. Acts 2:14ff.). I have come to repeat the Apostle’s urgent call to conversion and

¹ Paul VI, General Audience, November 29, 1972.

the forgiveness of sins, and to implore from the Lord a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church in this country.²

Later on the same visit in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, he even more emphatically proclaimed:

Let us implore from God the grace of a new Pentecost for the Church in America. May tongues of fire, combining burning love of God and neighbor with zeal for the spread of Christ's Kingdom, descend on all present!³

Pope Francis' repeated exhortations to share the grace of baptism in the Spirit with everyone and to hold life in the spirit seminars everywhere!

II. Lessons from the First Pentecost for a New Pentecost

John the Baptist Identifies Jesus as the One Who Will "Baptize in the Holy Spirit."

The teaching of Jesus:

Jesus Sends the "Promise of the Father" and "Power From on High."

Jesus, in a post resurrection appearance, interprets the scriptures to his disciples, explaining that it was necessary that "the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations." He tells them though not to undertake the mission until they receive the "promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Lk 24:44-49).

The Ascension Instructions

Luke recounts, in the Acts of the Apostles, that just before Jesus ascended to the Father, completing His post-resurrection appearances, He instructed the disciples, again, "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father . . . 'about which you have heard me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 1:4-5). The disciples' response was typical, asking Jesus if the time had arrived for Him to restore Israel's independence under their own king. Jesus, also as typical, doesn't directly answer their question, discouraging their eschatological

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily Given at Washington Nationals Stadium*, April 17, 2008. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20080417_washington-stadium_en.html Accessed November 3, 2009.

³ Benedict XVI, *Homily at St. Patrick's Cathedral*, April 19, 2008.

curiosity, but underlines the importance of their paying attention to what He has just told them. “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:1–12).

- The event of Pentecost and the explanation of Peter
- Luke gives an insight into what the scene must have been like by recording the interpretation of some whom had gathered, that the apostles “have had too much new wine” (Acts 2:1–4, 12).
- Peter then stands up and denies that they are drunk with wine (Paul would later exhort the Christians in Ephesus: “do not get drunk on wine . . . but be filled with the Spirit” [Eph 5:18]) and explains that what they are seeing and hearing is nothing less than the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament preparation of God’s people for the Messiah.
- Pentecost is the name of the feast day on which the “event” of the disciples being baptized in the Spirit happened. Pentecost was the occasion; baptism in the Spirit is the term used by Jesus and the apostles for the substance of what happened.
- The ongoing concern that Pentecost be experienced by each new group of converts (Acts 8, 10, 11, 19)

The Extension of Baptism in the Spirit: Cornelius and His Household

By means of divine guidance, Peter is led to the home of Cornelius, a Roman God-fearer, who also has been prepared by the Spirit to receive the visit and message of Peter. Peter explains the saving deeds of Christ to Cornelius, and while he is still speaking, “the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word” (Acts 10:44). The Jewish Christians who were with Peter “were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles, also, for they could hear them speaking in tongues and glorifying God” (Acts 10:45-46). Peter then declares that they should be baptized, because they “have received the Holy Spirit even as we have” (Acts 10:47). What happened to the disciples on the day of Pentecost, being baptized in the Spirit, happens now to Cornelius and his household. Peter’s assurance of the appropriateness of baptizing these Gentiles rests on perceiving, through visible indicators—speaking in tongues and glorifying God—that they have been baptized in the Spirit just as the apostles have been, and this, of course, is an indication that Jesus is present again, baptizing in the Spirit (Acts 10:44–48).

Peter’s Defense for Baptizing Gentiles: Remembering Jesus’ Words

Peter, understandably, is criticized for baptizing Gentiles. In his defense, he describes the manifest “falling” of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles, an experience which he could not deny; and then remembers

the theological explanation: “I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” Peter then declares that if God has given “the same gift” to the Gentiles that he gave to the Jewish Christians, how could Peter hinder what God was doing. The criticism turned to praise, as Peter’s colleagues acknowledged that God indeed had decided to grant “life-giving repentance to the Gentiles too,” as they were obviously baptized in the Spirit, just as the apostles had been (Acts 11:15–18).

The Extension of Baptism in the Spirit: Ephesus

Paul encounters a group of “disciples” in Ephesus, but must have noticed that something was missing in their experience of God. He asks them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they became believers and discovers that they have never even heard about the Holy Spirit, but have simply been baptized with the baptism for repentance of John the Baptist. Paul explains that John was simply preparing the way for Jesus and baptizes them in the name of Jesus. “When Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:1–7). Paul “fills in the picture” for these well meaning, but insufficiently evangelized, and catechized “disciples,” which enables them to be joined to Jesus through baptism and filled with the Spirit. Again, there are tangible signs that normally accompany being baptized in the Spirit. In this instance, speaking in tongues and prophesying are noted.

Sometimes it is noted that all of this persistent apostolic concern that each new group of converts come into the same experience of the Spirit as they did on the day of Pentecost are in the context of “new horizons” that are opening up for the spread of the Gospel, and that perhaps the “same experience” should not be expected in other, less significant, circumstances. This perspective, though, overlooks the whole witness of Acts and the Epistles to numerous Christian communities living a life characterized by a “culture of Pentecost” way beyond the specific incidents of initiation recounted in Acts. To cite just one:

O stupid Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? I want to learn only this from you: did you receive the Spirit from works of the law, or from faith in what you heard? Are you so stupid? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain?—if indeed it was in vain. Does, then, the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works mighty deeds among you do so from works of the law or from faith in what you heard? (Gal 3:1–5)

Repeated Fillings with the Spirit

As opposition rises against the believers (including harsh threats, beatings and actual imprisonments), they confidently ask God for the boldness and supernatural power necessary to carry out their mission in the face of such opposition. “‘And now Lord, take note of their threats, and enable your servants to speak your word with all boldness, as you stretch forth your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’ As they prayed, the place where they were gathered shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:23–33).

As almost 1700 years of Christendom collapses and a new international pagan culture gains the ascendancy, even rising to that “dictatorship of relativism” that Benedict XVI warns us about, the Church in the West is encountering circumstances that are more like those encountered by the early Church than anything we’ve known in our lifetime. The recent popes’ consistent calls for a new Pentecost as being perhaps the deepest need of the Church today, surely can only be advanced by a deeper theological understanding of what many millions have experienced as baptism in the Holy Spirit.

How did it happen the first time?

- Teaching on the importance of the Holy Spirit
- Faith in the teaching
- Desire for its fulfillment
- Obedient prayer and expectation
- The prayer of Mary
- Confirmation as the perpetuation of Pentecost (CCC, 1288, 1302)

Ralph Martin, [A New Pentecost? Catholic Theology and "Baptism in the Spirit"](#) *LOGOS: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 4:13 Summer 2011

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