

St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. Sermon on Pentecost 1

Acts 2:1-4 Douay translation.

1 And when the days of the Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together in one place: 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them: 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak.

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:4) Today's entire solemnity is about the coming of the Holy Spirit, who visibly, in the form of fire, descended from heaven on the apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ. Our sermon today shall be about this. And, God willing, we will have many teachings for the illumination of your understanding and for the instruction of life. Let us "Hail" the Virgin Mary etc.

The common doctrine is clear from the text of the Gospels, because the apostles and disciples before the passion of Christ and the resurrection, did not have the fullness of the Holy Spirit although they had him for the plenitude of grace and for the perfection of the spirit, and yet in many ways they were defective. And although Christ could have given them the Holy Spirit perfectly for the fullness of grace, nevertheless he preferred not to give it to them before his passion and resurrection. The reason is that there would be preserved a conformity between the proper and natural body of Christ, and his appropriated and figurative body. The proper and natural body of Christ is that which he received in the womb of the Virgin, united to his divinity, about which scripture speaks. "Who his own self bore our sins in his body on the tree," namely his proper and natural body, (1 Pet. 2:24). The appropriated and figurative body of Christ is the Church. because it was entirely in the apostles and disciples of Christ of whose body Christ himself is the head. Authority. "And he has made him head over all the Church, which is his body," (Eph. 1:22).

Now it is certain that before the resurrection of Christ in his own natural body there were many defects – not moral but natural defects – therefore to preserve the proportion in the figurative and mystical body of Christ, before his resurrection, there were many moral defects. But after the resurrection of Christ, when his natural body was free of all defects of natural passions, it is fitting that his mystical body and figurative body would also have the fullness of the Holy Spirit. And this reason John touches upon when he says, "For as yet the Spirit was not given, because Jesus was not yet glorified," (Jn 7:39). But today, they receive the Holy Spirit for the plenitude of grace and spiritual

perfections. About this our theme speaks: "Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." It does not say they accepted the Holy Spirit, because already they had accepted him through sanctifying [*gratificantem*] grace. But "they were filled" which is to say that they were filled again, just as John 3, "reborn" and also "filled" that is filled again.

I find that after the resurrection of Christ, the apostles and disciples received the Holy Spirit in three fullnesses:

- First with the fullness of intellectual knowledge.
- Second with the fullness of spiritual power.
- And third with the fullness of universal eloquence.

But today's reception was greater, therefore the theme says: "All were filled."

First of all, they were plain, simple and ignorant people. But after the resurrection, understanding filled them with intellectual knowledge so clearly that they would understand the scriptures, saying to them it is necessary, "that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then he opened their understanding that they might understand the scriptures," (Lk 24:44f). Of this fullness we're able to say they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, intellectually.

Secondly, they received it with the fullness of spiritual power. Because a presider or legate of the pope needs great power. So, the apostles who were sent by the "pope" Jesus." For Christ, therefore we are ambassadors, God as it were exhorting by us," (2 Cor 5:20). It is necessary therefore for them to have spiritual power. See how he gave them this power after the resurrection, saying to them, "As the Father has sent me, I also send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them; and he said to them: Receive the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained," (Jn 20:21-23).

And why did he breathe on them? I say to show the authority of the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit proceeds from him. Just as breath proceeds from the breather, so the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father but also from the Son. And of this fullness we can say speaks to the theme, namely, "They were filled with the Holy Spirit," (Acts 2:4), and spiritual power, because then the promise was fulfilled which Christ made before his passion saying, "Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven," (Mt 18:18).

Third they received the Holy Spirit with the fullness of universal eloquence. And this grace they received today. About which the theme says "They all were filled with the Holy Spirit. And they began to speak with diverse tongues as the Holy Spirit gave them to speak," (Acts 2:4). The theme is clear and we are now in the aforesaid material.

Now I go to practical things which I shall declare through four necessary dispositions for receiving the Holy Spirit with a fullness of grace.

First, is bodily abstinence,

Second, is affective prayer,

Third is fraternal concord, and

Fourth is doctrinal listening.

All these dispositions, each and every one, the apostles and disciples of Christ had, on account of which the theme says: "They were filled etc."

ABSTINENCE

The first proper and necessary disposition for receiving the grace of the Holy Spirit is corporal abstinence from excessive food, drink, sleeping, speaking, laughing, delights in looking at women or men, and conversations with people. Such abstinence is the proper and necessary disposition for receiving the Holy Spirit. This I explain through this story. If branches are green or soaking wet, and are thrown into the fire they will not burn, at least until the wood becomes dried out. Drying of wood necessarily precedes burning. And so of you. Persons dissolute in food and drink etc., are like green wood. How dissolute and green you are! If therefore you wish that the fire of the Holy Spirit to be inflamed and burning in you it is necessary that you be dry, and don't eat so often and drink so often, or sleep so much and so with the rest. Abstain, keep yourself from worldly things, from corporeal pleasures and the like and then the fires of the Holy Spirit will burn in you. Authority: A great battlefield was shown to the prophet Ezekiel, covered with dry bones, of which bones the prophet, speaking from the word of God, says, "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." The Lord says this to these bones: "Behold, I will send spirit into you and you shall live," (Ez 37:5). Dry bones are those persons abstaining from delights and vices and business. Into these God sends the Holy Spirit. It is clear therefore that abstinence is a proper and necessary disposition for obtaining the grace of the Holy Spirit.

I say that the apostles and disciples of Christ have it through this. For from the day of the ascension up to today they fasted and they abstained not only from food and drink but also from delights and business, knowing that abstinence was necessary. This we have from the three evangelists who say that the Pharisees came to Christ saying, "Master," and Christ, "What do you wish." "Tell us," he says, "why do the disciples of John and the Pharisees fast,

but your disciples do not fast?" (Mk 2:18). And Christ responds "Can the children of the marriage fast as long as the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them. And then they shall fast, in those days," (Mk 2:19-20). From this text we have it that the apostles, from the ascension of Christ, because then he was taken away, then the bridegroom was taken from them, until today they fasted from food and drink and business, etc. Let this be the reason. If abstinence then is so necessary for having the Holy Spirit, and the apostles did this, what shall we say? They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, because today the fire of the Holy Spirit descended on them and set them afire.

DEVOUT PRAYER

The second very necessary disposition is affective or devout prayer, because some people pray in a way which properly speaking is not called prayer. They make certain recitations, when they are all dressed up, and women when they are all decorated. Such things properly are not called prayers. But affective prayers is when a man, on bended knees, raising his hands to heaven, and with eyes and heart, just as one might plead before a pope or a king. Think that you were seeing Christ, in the cathedral of glory, and you were frightened, and then terror comes in your heart and you begin your prayer. This is the good and necessary disposition for receiving the Holy Spirit.

This is explained by comparison to breathing. He who breathes a breath from a warm mouth etc. and afterwards there is sensed fresh air. Devout prayer is breath warmed through devotion and moistened, when God gives tears to your prayer. Thus, the fresh breath of the Holy Spirit is experienced, because from his power he refreshes the soul against the fevers of sin, avarice and lust, etc. Authority: "I opened my mouth and breathed the spirit [*attraxi spiritum*]," (Ps 118:131) namely, in fervent prayer." Now the apostles and disciples of Christ, knowing that this disposition was necessary, from the day of the ascension, prayed fervently each day and night until today. Authority: Acts 1: "All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus," (Acts 1:14).

Now we find here a good and subtle question about predestination. Some would say, "Did not Christ promise and ordain and infallibly predestine the sending of the Holy Spirit to the apostles? Why is it necessary for them to seek and to pray that he send it?" This question many people ask, saying, "If God has predestined me to be saved, why is it necessary that I struggle and do penance, because whatever God has ordained, that will happen?"

I respond and I say that God predestined, ordained and promised to send the Holy Spirit to his apostles and disciples. Nevertheless it was necessary that they pray and ask for the Spirit. Therefore can the promise fail? I say no. But although God has promised, nevertheless it requires a disposition.

For example, if the pope promises some balsam oil or chrism which are precious liquids, and you come to receive the balsam with a dirty jug, filled with leftover waste, the pope wouldn't give it to you. Because with the promise it is expected that there should be due preparation of the containers. And so when the Jesus "pope" promised the apostles the Holy Spirit, he said I promise to fill your vessels of conscience, of memory, of intellects and wills with the balsam of the Holy Spirit. On this account the apostles should wash their consciences by abstaining, by praying etc. It is the same with predestination.

All those predestined are written already in the white book in gold letters. Not only is it written there that Peter or John or Magdalen shall be saved, but even the work through which they shall be saved, namely, because he was baptized, or he was merciful and patient and chaste etc. So also with those predestined to be damned. All have been written in the black book. And not only is it written that such and such a person shall be damned, but also the works for which they are damned, because he was a sinner, proud, avaricious, lustful or vengeful, and finally, because he was impenitent. If therefore the foreknown and damned give up those works, the effect of their damnation shall not follow. Because it is so ordained that such an effect of damnation or of salvation follows from such works. This is the reason why the apostles were praying, although Christ's promise to them was certain. And so they said "Let us prepare because otherwise he will not send it to us." Gregory: "This predestination to the eternal kingdom is so disposed by the omnipotence of God that those chosen for this, by their labor, arrive, that by praying they might merit to receive what the omnipotent God, before the ages, has disposed to give to them."

CONCORD

The third necessary condition is fraternal concord; not to have any rancor, hatred, ill will or desire of revenge towards your neighbor. Because the Holy Spirit does not dwell in a town or a divided community. And there is a natural reason for this, because just as the human spirit requires the connection of the members for the life that it gives to the body, – because if the members are divided, the head is by itself and the feet and the hands, and the other parts, the spirit departs. It does not remain with the other divided member – so it is with the Holy Spirit. Think how the whole community is one body and it has many members, diverse members, like a human body. The eyes are the

speculative part, the men of knowledge; the ears are the judges and the lords who have to hear justice; the noses are the devout filled with the odor of Christ and the saints; the mouth are the priests who prepare the sacrament of the Eucharist, by which all its members are fed and nourished, etc. The arms are the soldiers who defend the whole body, the workers are those who sustain the whole like the feet; the head is Christ, "Whereas in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office, so we being many are one body in Christ," (Rom 12:4). And as long as we are united and joined in good peace and concord, – when the nobles have love for the commoners, the commoners honor the nobles, the clergy get along with the laity and vice versa, a husband with his wife and vice versa, the father with his son, and the son with the father – as long as that happens, the Holy Spirit vivifies the body of the community. But if the members are divided through injuries and resentments, etc. the Holy Spirit immediately departs. Authority: "These are they, who separate themselves, sensual men, having not the Spirit," (Jude 1:19). It is clear therefore that fraternal concord is necessary. This the apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ had.

There had been discord and division between them, between the apostles; John and James on the one hand and the others, because their mother at one time had spoken to Christ about them. "Say that these my two sons may sit, the one at thy right hand and the other at thy left, in thy kingdom," (Mt 20:21). And the ten hearing this were indignant with the two brothers. Again, think how they sought pardon. And devoutly and reasonably, it is believed, that for the good and concord of them all, that James and John asked pardon of the others for their presumption and their preference which they had sought.

Secondly there was the discord among the apostles between themselves over which one of them was greater in the kingdom of heaven. As is clear in Luke 22:24ff. Think how, in these days, reconciling, they asked pardon.

Third between Thomas the apostle on the one hand and the others, because Thomas was stubborn and would not believe the other apostles telling him that Christ had risen. Think how he sought pardon of them for his stubbornness of heart, (Cf. Jn 20:24ff).

And again between Magdalen and the other Marys, and the apostles, who when they told the apostles that Christ had risen, that they had seen him before the others, these words were judged to be hallucinations and they didn't believe them. Lk 24: "And these words seemed to them as idle tales, and they did not believe them," (Lk 24:11). And they asked pardon of the women.

Think therefore, how the apostles and especially Thomas the Apostle asked pardon of the Virgin Mary, who, when she told them that her Son had risen from the dead and appeared to her, didn't believe her.

And so at the ascension Christ scolded them. As is clear in the last chapter of Mark: "At length he appeared to the eleven as they were at table and he upbraided them with their incredulity and hardness of heart, because they did not believe them who had seen him after he was risen again," (Mk 16:14).

So in these days he made peace with them: Text: "And when the days of Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together, i.e. reconciled, in the same place" (Acts 2:1). If therefore today you wish to receive the Holy Spirit, make peace, in the example of the apostles, because otherwise you are not able to receive it. Authority: "Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man can see God, looking diligently lest any man be wanting to the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up, do hinder," (Heb 12:14). Note: Peace of holiness is the peace which is good and true according to God, because other peace is evil, as the peace between sinners, thieves, and murderers etc.

DOCTRINAL HEARING

The fourth very necessary disposition for receiving the Holy Spirit is doctrinal hearing, to hear freely the word of God. I don't say the word of Ovid, Terence, Virgil and the others, because how can they or whoever does not have the Holy Spirit, give it to you? It is made clear by the image of flint which struck by steel shoots fire. Rightly it is so regarding preaching. The flint stone is Christ. Christ is also the rock, [...and the rock was Christ, (1 Cor 10:4)]. The steel or brass is the tongue of the preacher. Authority "For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you," (Mt 10:20). Charcoal [*materia nigra*] is the people who are black from sin. They are ignited by the fire of the Holy Spirit, when in the first or second or third sermon the proud man, the vain, the pompous one, is humbled, and decides to live simply. Now the person is ignited with the fire of the Holy Spirit and so with the other sins. Authority: "While Peter was yet speaking these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word," (Acts 10:44).

The apostles experienced that doctrinal hearing of the word of God, because every day since the day of the ascension they had a sermon. If it is asked "Who preached?" I say that the Virgin Mary, whom Christ left behind in his place as teacher and master. "For it is she that teaches the knowledge of God, and is the chooser of his works," (Wis 8:4).

Before his ascension Christ promised the Holy Spirit to the apostles saying: "It is expedient to you that I go: for if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of justice, and of judgment," (Jn 16:7-8), but he did not tell them when, neither the day nor the hour. There was another promise on the day of the ascension, when he was on the Mount of Olives and about to ascend, he said, "For John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence," (Acts 1:5).

The apostles, not knowing the specific day of this promise, on the day of the ascension, and on Friday, the next day and on Saturday were waiting, believing that on these days he would send the Holy Spirit. But when these three days passed, seeing that Christ had not sent them the Holy Spirit, they began to be saddened and to say to one another, "O when shall he send it?"

One of them responded, "Do not doubt, because tomorrow, which is Sunday he will send it. The reason which leads me to this conclusion is that on such a day God formed the light and divided light from darkness. So, it is reasonable that on such a day he would send us the light of the Holy Spirit. And Sunday came and he did not send the Spirit, and they wondered.

Another said, on Monday he will send the Spirit, because on that day he made the firmament, and he divided the waters above the firmament from the waters below the firmament, and therefore he shall come on such a day, because we need the firmament of courage, to divide the waters of virtue from the waters of vice. And he did not come.

Another said on Tuesday he will come, or the Spirit will be sent, because on that day God produced the plants for bearing fruit, therefore on such a day he would send the Spirit, so we can plant the catholic faith that it might be able to bear fruit. And he did not come to those awaiting.

Another said on Wednesday the Spirit will be sent. The reason is because on such a day God formed the sun, the moon and the planets, so on such a day he would send the Spirit that he might create in us the sun of charity, the moon of hope, the stars of the virtues. And he did not come. Think how confused and saddened they were.

Another said on Thursday the Spirit would come, because on that day he ascended from our sight. So, on such a day he will comfort us. And he did not come.

Another said on Friday. Because on that day he had suffered, and we have the sorrows of his passion, and so on such a day we deserve that he would give the comforting Holy Spirit. And he did not come.

Another said on Saturday he shall come, because on that day we were dispersed, so that no one stayed with another. Thus today, so that we might be united together. Seeing however that Saturday passed and he had not come, and now that their calculations of the days had failed and since they were afraid of the Jews, the text says, "The disciples were gathered together, for fear of the Jews," (Jn 20:19), think how with good reason they were sad and desolate.

And so today, they were gathered together at the door of the room of the Virgin Mary, awaiting for her to come out as she usually did. The Virgin however had arisen in the middle of the night, according to scripture, "I rose at midnight to give praise to thee," (Ps 118:62), and she was praying her office.

When finally the Virgin Mary came out of her room and saw all the apostles and disciples weeping she said to them, "What is this my sons? Why are you weeping? Because my Son now reigns in heaven." And they said to her, "Our Blessed Mother, your Son promised to send the Holy Spirit to us, saying, 'I will not leave you orphans among the Jews' but now ten days have passed since he ascended and he has not yet sent us the Holy Spirit." The Virgin Mary replied, "Don't you doubt my children, because my Son does not have the limiting condition of ordinary men, who in poverty recognize their friends, and when they are prosperous and honored, they no longer care or even remember them. But I shall give you the reason why he has not yet sent the Spirit. Are you unaware that when God delivered the people of Israel from captivity in Egypt, he descended on the fiftieth day in the form of fire on Mount Sinai to give the law?" And the apostles said, "Blessed Virgin, we know this well." And the Virgin replied, "This was a figure, that my Son on the day of his resurrection delivered from the captivity of hell all those believing in him and obedient to him. Today is the fiftieth day from the resurrection of my Son. So he will send the Holy Spirit now. So turn yourselves, all, to devout prayer, because that which has been ordained by God, is accomplished by prayers and devout orations."

Then Peter the Apostle, praying with the other apostles gathered at one side of the room said, "Create a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit within my bowels." David had recorded it in Ps 50: 12.

Lazarus, with the other seventy-two disciples, on their knees on the other side were saying, "And who shall know your thought, unless you give

wisdom, and send your Holy Spirit from above. And so the ways of them who are upon earth may be corrected, and men may learn the things that please you? For by wisdom they were healed, whosoever have pleased you, O Lord, from the beginning," (Wis 9: 17-19).

Mary Magdalen and the other holy women, on bended knees praying were saying, "Restore unto me the joy of your salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit," (Ps 50: 14).

Finally the apostles said to the Virgin Mary, "Blessed Virgin, you too pray, because your Son hears you immediately." And it was then the third hour [about 9 am].

Then the Virgin, kneeling, prayed saying, "You shall send forth your spirit, and they shall be created: and you shall renew the face of the earth," (Ps 103: 30). Note: "and they shall be created," namely the virtues, infused graces, gifts and the perfections, and "you shall renew the face of the earth," namely through the preaching of your apostles and disciples.

When the Virgin Mary completed her prayer, suddenly there was from the heaven a great sound, like thunder, not earthly thunder, but delightful, as if a voice responding to the Virgin Mary. This was heard only by those who were in Jerusalem. And suddenly, like a wind it descended from heaven, and that sound filled the whole house where the apostles were, and the whole house was filled with fire.

People came running toward the sound and they beheld the bright fire through the windows, but that fire was not burning but lighting things up, and they saw white smoke like the smoke from incense, and that fire divided itself into tongues which sat on each of them, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit," (Acts 2: 4).

Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Joel: "Moreover upon my servants and handmaids in those days I will pour forth my spirit. And I will show wonders in heaven; and in earth, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood: before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. And it shall come to pass, that every one who shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," (Joel 2:29-32). Note: "And I will show wonders in heaven," because at that time the sky above Jerusalem was seen to appear bloody, reminding that by the merit of the passion of Christ the Holy Spirit was sent to the apostles and disciples. And bright fire appeared on earth, which could be seen by all in the house where the apostles were. And the vapors of smoke like the smoke of incense, etc.