

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of Pentecost
May 24, 2015

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At Pentecost spectacular events accompanied the coming of the Holy Ghost into the life of the Church. Noticed by one and all was that those who received the Holy Spirit were enabled to speak the languages of every nation. And then there was the unique phenomenon of tongues of fire descending and landing upon the heads of the apostles. We commemorate the first of these events with the reading of the Lesson about Pentecost in foreign languages. But we are more *prudent* in our commemoration of tongues of fire on your heads. Not many of you would have signed up for that! Instead, we wear *red clothing* to commemorate the descent of the Holy Ghost.

Both the many languages and the tongues of fire are signs the Holy Ghost speaks to the hearts of all people. Very early on, non-Christians wondered why *all* the Christians were not multi-linguistic. And the early answer was that it is *the Church* which speaks everyone's language. In the Archdiocese of Boston this happens in a literal way on every Sunday, when Mass is celebrated in twenty-seven different languages and dialects, twenty-eight if you include Elizabethan English!

It may seem strange the apostles needed such equipment as provided by the Holy Ghost. They had been with the Lord Jesus throughout His ministry. They had seen His miracles, heard His preaching, been taught by Him in private, made their first communion at the Last Supper, fled at His Passion, been overjoyed at His Resurrection and reconciled to Him, and witnessed His Ascension. *But it was not enough*. Suppose you have been lucky enough to visit Paris a hundred times and know the ins and outs of the city. But that would not automatically make you a goodwill ambassador for the city. There has to be *inspiration* as well. In some way like that, after being with Jesus, the experience was absorbed into the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Anticipating the coming gift of the Holy Ghost, the Blessed Lord had said, "Ye shall receive power." Just as His Own ministry had been effectual through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, so it was to be with the apostles and with all His followers. And remember that Christ never gives a command without the power to perform it. It is *the same Holy Ghost* which was in Jesus Christ and poured out on the apostles at Pentecost that was also given to you at your baptism and

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confirmation. The Lord promised ‘Ye shall receive power....to be My witnesses.’ That was the Lord’s last command before His Ascension. So, unless things went amiss at Pentecost, it has happened as the Lord had said. The Holy Ghost speaks to the hearts of all people through those who witness to Jesus Christ.

Of course from the very outset, the world got the Church wrong. When it looked at Pentecost from outside looking in, the world thought the apostles were drunk. It has always been a source of amusement that the first Christian sermon began, “*We are not drunk!*” But the critics were on to something. The Lord had counseled, “No one puts new wine in old wineskins. The apostles had become fresh wineskins when the Lord called them to become fishers of men. Now the new wine of the Holy Ghost filled them with new wine. And even the outside world could see the difference even if it misunderstood what was happening. The Holy Ghost confers Christian character. Ecstasy may look like inebriation even if it is only nine o'clock in the morning!

Fishers of men and new wine are a winning combination. And if our wills are cooperating with God’s grace, our thoughts being directed and our conduct guided by the Holy Ghost, then the world will see charity and holiness. The world may not like what it sees. We are told on good authority it prefers darkness to light. Just as it did not understand the work of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, and came to hate that work, so too we will be called or sorts of names, drunk, *and worse*. But charity and holiness are true manifestations of the Holy Ghost, and in those who receive these gifts they will always be the best form of Catholic witness.