

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Pentecost  
May 15, 2016

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The phrase the “Seven Last Words of Christ” usually refers to Good Friday and the seven times Our Lord Jesus spoke from the Cross. But in fact Christ’s *actual* last words recorded in Scripture are said on Ascension Day, in His final moments before returning to the Heavenly realm. The Lord said, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me.”

Many people utter last words. And last words are remembered in history when they are significant. But in *this* case the significance of the last words of Jesus Son of God is that *He said them*. And that does not take away from what He said but adds to the importance of the content of His words. In His parting utterance Christ chose to command His disciples that their paramount duty was to be His witnesses. In the same breath Jesus promised His followers the power to make it all possible.

We might think the disciples of Christ were already well-equipped to be His witnesses. After all, they had been with the Lord throughout His ministry. They had heard His preaching, seen His miracles, and witnessed His passion and resurrection. They were about to witness His Ascension. But the Lord Jesus told them all of that was not enough! Just as His Own ministry had been effective through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, *so must be theirs*.

The Holy Ghost is no frosting on the cake! The Holy Ghost is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. He is as truly God as are the First and Second Persons. And the Holy Ghost is the *Life Giver*. He is the One Who lived in Adam until sin drove Him out, and Who returned to the human race in Our Lord’s sinless manhood. Now the Holy Ghost was being given by Christ to the Church to be her life and guiding light. The *same* Holy Ghost Who was in Jesus Christ and was poured out upon the Apostles at Pentecost also enters our life to be the life and light of our souls. That happens at baptism.

So just what describes the gift for witness the Holy Ghost gives us? *Conviction* is one of His trademarks. Conviction is our living experience of the truth of the Catholic faith we profess. There is a moment, perhaps many moments, when you pass from saying “I accept” the Truth the Church teaches, to embracing that Truth because verified in your own experience. The Holy Ghost is the agent of that

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change. When the men of Samaria said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves” it was because she had brought them to where Jesus was. After Our Lord’s Ascension into Heaven, *it is the Holy Ghost Who brings us to where Christ is.*

*Courage* is a sign of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. How easily we can become the trembling slaves of public opinion. How easily our lips are locked when we appear to be outnumbered or alone. But remember that wonderful incident at a national prayer breakfast years ago when Mother Teresa of Calcutta was the honored guest and speaker. All four-foot eight inches of her stood alone at a podium before members of all three branches of government and she said America would only come into its great world role when it put off its culture of death. Most of the government officials did not want to hear that, and they sat on their hands. But that did not stop Mother Teresa! How greatly we need the Holy Ghost to stir up courage and boldness as necessary and vital ingredients of Catholic witness. The Holy Ghost is the giver of *fortitude*.

*Character* is the other sign of the presence of the Holy Ghost. It is not enough to know the faith and proclaim it. We must *live* it. Character is the real secret ingredient of witnesses for Christ. We do it in as many different ways as there are different personalities among us. The compelling figures of Christian history notably include some rough and irascible types such as St Jerome, St John Chrysostom, St Thomas Becket, and G.K. Chesterton, as well as the more winsome and attractive personalities. That is because Christian character is the work of the Holy Ghost, and His stamp is variable yet quite unmistakable, *and always genuine*. There may be nothing conventional, and not always respectable, about such character, but it is always recognized to be no human product but the veritable work of God. Holiness has an invisible odor *and they’ll sniff it*.

Just think that before Pentecost the words of Jesus reached a few thousand sets of ears in Jerusalem and environs. But with the counsel of the Holy Ghost the words of Christ’s witnesses still ring out throughout the world. From what began in an upper room in Jerusalem the Holy Ghost has created new life in untold numbers of souls. Today and every day we call upon the Holy Ghost to dominate and inspire

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our wills, control our thoughts, and direct our conduct. Only then can we obey Our Lord's final command, and add our individual testimony to the ongoing record of His witnessing Church. You and I have belonged to that Church since we received the Holy Ghost at Baptism.