

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of Pentecost  
May 20, 2018

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On Pentecost, reading the first lesson in so many different languages almost eclipses the prominence of the gospel! The lesson from *The Acts of the Apostles* gets special treatment for a reason. Among the spectacular events on the first Pentecost it was noticed those who received the Holy Ghost were enabled to speak the languages of every nation. This is a reminder Almighty God chose the miracles of Pentecost to indicate the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church. It is safer to recall this fact by way of these languages than to reproduce tongues of fire on your heads! No one would volunteer for that!

Someone might ask why we do not *all* speak in tongues. The answer, of course, is that we are part of the Body of Christ, the Church, and it is *the Church* which speaks every language. Going to Mass in a foreign country can give a vivid reminder of that fact. In this one archdiocese Mass is offered in twenty-eight different languages and dialects, including Elizabethan English!

This is a sign the Holy Ghost speaks to the hearts of all people. But there is something else. In His last command on earth the Lord Jesus promised, “Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be My witnesses.” So unless we believe things went wrong on Pentecost, it has happened as the Lord had said. The Holy Ghost speaks to the hearts of all people through those who witness to Christ.

All who accept the command of Jesus, and the power to perform it, have this paramount duty to witness. When our lives are full of other things we must remember the apostles certainly had many things to do! They had to organize church infrastructure: minister the sacraments, feed the poor, shelter widows and orphans, visit the shut-ins. This activity is all described in the early chapters of *The Acts of the Apostles*. St Peter was given a special ministry of chief shepherd. But for all of them the first duty was witness. When you and I seem to be doing all sorts of things at once we call it “multi-tasking” and sometimes say “I have a full plate.” But for you and me also, the primary duty is witness.

It may seem strange the apostles needed to be equipped by the Holy Ghost. They had been with Christ throughout His ministry. They had seen His miracles, heard

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His preaching, been taught by Him in private, experienced 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.* Think of it this way: it is possible to have visited Paris thirty times and still not be much of an ambassador for the city. There has to be inspirational motivation.

“Ye shall receive power,” said the Lord Jesus. His Own ministry had been effectual through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, and it was to be this way with the apostles, and with all His followers. Remember Christ never gives a command without the power to perform it. Remember also it is the *same Holy Ghost* which was in Jesus Christ and poured out on the apostles at Pentecost that was given to you at your Confirmation.

That same winning combination of inspiration and power to witness has been bestowed upon us. If the Holy Ghost is informing our wills, directing our thoughts, and guiding our conduct, there will be a result. The world will see *charity* and *holiness*. If the world does not understand the work of the Holy Spirit or hates it, we are going to be called all sorts of names. At the first Pentecost some thought the apostles were drunk at nine in the morning! But the apostles were not deterred. Anywhere and everywhere, even in the face of opposition, charity and holiness will *always* be the best form of Catholic witness.