

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of Pentecost  
June 9, 2019

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The Last Words of Christ usually refers to the seven times Our Lord Jesus spoke from the Cross on Good Friday. Many books of meditations have been written on these words and they have sometimes been set to music. Franz Joseph Haydn made a memorable setting of *The Seven Last Words*. For the earthquake, the score called for the loudest music ever written in the eighteenth century!

But in fact Christ's *actual last words* recorded in Scripture are said on Ascension Day. These were the last moments before His final entrance into the heavenly realm. On Ascension Day the Lord said "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me."

History is full of memories of men's last words. Sometimes this is because the man was important, or the words were important or both. The significance of the last words of Jesus is that He is the Son of God. But that does not take away from the importance of what He said. In His parting instructions to His disciples Our Lord Jesus said their paramount duty is to be His *witnesses*. In the same breath He promised them the *power* to make it all possible.

Some may think the disciples were already well-enough equipped for this task. They had been with Jesus throughout His ministry. They had heard His preaching and seen His miracles. They had witnessed His Passion and Resurrection and were about to witness His Ascension. Nevertheless, Jesus told them it was not enough! Just as His Own earthly ministry had been effective through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, so it must be with theirs.

The Holy Ghost is not an extra-added attraction! He is not like frosting on the cake and you can do without the extra calories! The Holy Ghost is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, as truly God as are the First and Second Persons. The Holy Ghost is the *Life Giver*. He is the One Who lived in Adam until sin made it impossible to stay. The Holy Ghost returned to the human race in Our Lord's sinless manhood. And now in Christ's last words of instruction, the Holy Ghost was being given to Christ's people, His Church, to be her life and guiding light. The *same* Holy Ghost Who was in Jesus Christ, and poured out upon the Apostles at Pentecost, enters our life at baptism to be the life and light of our souls.

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So what are the hallmarks of the power for witness the Holy Ghost gives to us? The seven-fold gifts of the Spirit fit into three categories: **Conviction**, **Courage**, and **Character**.

When you have passed from saying “I accept” the Catholic faith to embracing the Truth because it is verified by your own experience, that is **conviction**. And it is the work of the Holy Ghost in you. Remember the incident of the Samaritan woman at the well. When the men of Sychar finally 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 Christ is. After Our Lord’s Ascension into Heaven, it is the Holy Spirit Who brings us to where Christ is.

**Courage** is another sign of the indwelling work of the Holy Ghost. How easily we can become the trembling slaves of public opinion! How easily our lips are locked when we appear outnumbered or alone. Some of you have had the experience of praying the Rosary outside an abortion clinic and being called every name in the book! At a national prayer breakfast many years ago Mother Teresa of Calcutta said America would only come into its great world role when it put off its culture of death. Most of the government leaders didn’t want to hear that, and they sat on their hands. She said it anyway! How greatly we need the Holy Ghost to stir up courage and boldness as necessary ingredients of Catholic witness. The Holy Ghost is the giver of *fortitude*.

And then **character** is a sign of the Presence of the Holy Ghost. It is not enough to know the faith and proclaim it. Finally, we must live it. Character is the *way* we witness for Christ, and we do it in as many different ways as there are different personalities among us. Sometimes those personalities are rough and irascible types: think of St Jerome, St John Chrysostom, St Thomas Becket, G.K. Chesterton, and Padre Pio. Christian character is the work of the Holy Ghost and His stamp is variable, yet quite unmistakable, and always genuine. People seeking holiness may sometimes be surprised where they find it.

The Lord’s final instructions to His flock have never been withdrawn. Before Pentecost the words of Jesus reached a few thousand sets of ears in a remote corner

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of the Mediterranean basin. But the words of Christ's witnesses, fueled by the Holy Ghost, still ring throughout the whole world. From what began in an Upper Room in Jerusalem, the Holy Ghost has created new life in untold numbers of souls. It is only as we call upon God the Holy Ghost to dominate and inspire our wills, control our thoughts, and direct our conduct, that you and I can obey Our Lord's final command to be witnesses unto Him.