

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at Evensong and Benediction  
On The Solemnity of Pentecost  
June 9, 2019

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When you visit your neighborhood *Hallmark* store weeks before Christmas you find the rack stocked with seasonal greeting cards. You will have the same experience in the weeks prior to Easter. But of the three great festivals of the Church Year, Pentecost is the least festive. Return to the card shop in the weeks prior to today's solemnity and the special seasonal greeting cards are about Mother's Day, Father's Day, first communions, and graduations.

The reason for this goes beyond the secular observances which crowd the calendar in late spring. Feasts of Our Lord Jesus easily put into our minds His wonderful Person. And the designers of greetings cards can easily portray a baby lying in a manger or a Risen Lord greeting Mary Magdalene. This reminds us before Ascension Day the experience of Christians came from their intimate companionship with Jesus in His humanity. Christ's followers wanted those experiences to never end. But the Lord announced He would make a final return into the heavenly realm. This was not to leave His followers alone! He promised His Ascension would allow for a *much more intimate experience* than they had previously known. But how do the *Hallmark* greeting card people design an "intimate experience?"

Before Christ's Ascension, the full experience of the Godhead in Jesus of Nazareth was the equivalent to what is give us, since that day, in the Blessed Sacrament we will worship and adore in the monstrance at Benediction. The Sacrament of His Body and Blood is, until time ends, His Presence **with** us. But Pentecost brings a *new experience of God*. It is an actual communion with Him, and a participation in God's Own Life. This is the work of the Holy Ghost **in** us. *Immanuel* is God **with** us. The *Paraclete* is God **in** us. God's gifts to us are lavish. We are given *both*.

God in us is the only explanation making sense of the heroic witness of the early martyrs, and the martyrs in all ages of the Church. These men and women, boys and girls, were not life-haters or death-wishers! Rather, by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost the martyrs were participating in the life of Christ. From that vantage point, the old physical world could only offer temptations, threats, and death. Nothing could get the martyrs to secede from the life of Christ that was in them.

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Pentecost is Almighty God's gift that the life of Christ can become our own life. And when that happens, it is the work of the Holy Ghost. This is precisely why there is less of a festival feeling about Pentecost and why the card shops do not stock rows of Holy Ghost cards! Truth be told, we are ready enough to adore Christ in the manger or on the Cross or at the empty tomb. We are not so ready to have God in Christ come into ourselves through the agency of the Holy Ghost.

Saint Paul told the *Galatians* the Holy Ghost infuses love, joy, peace, longsuffering, and gentleness into our hearts. The entrance of those gifts into the life of the Church, and in the life of the Christian, is not the end of a spiritual struggle but its *intensification*. These fruits of the Holy Ghost only penetrate the spirit of a man or woman when they have trampled over the works of the flesh. You can read about those in *Galatians* as well! Greeting cards are for nice occasions, or they try to smooth over or console difficult occasions. But Pentecost is not a nice moment or one to smooth over! The coming of the Holy Ghost means we have arrived at the struggle with temptation. The Holy Ghost equips us for battle.

The good news is even though we have not yet achieved serenity and blessedness, which are also gifts of the Holy Ghost, we are still the children of a new birth. The seeds are planted in us. And as Christ is good so too are His saving remedies. In the mystery of the Holy Trinity the Holy Ghost is both the Spirit which indwelt the earthly life of Jesus Christ, *and* It is His Own Spirit. Almighty God cannot be divided. He can only be understood as He works in us and for us.

Our chief desire is to be one with Our Lord Jesus. That must happen on His terms and not ours! So we strive to enter by the way Jesus once said was *narrow*. Our aim is to live as though love, joy, peace, longsuffering, and gentleness already rule in our hearts. And please God they will! The way to embrace the gifts of the Holy Ghost is to invite Him to rule and have free reign in our hearts. Which is why we pray "*Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire.*"