

**May 20, 2018**  
**Pentecost**

We all like spectacular fireworks. They are exciting, impressive, exhilarating. The Church's first Pentecost had some spectacular fireworks. The Apostles and other Christians were gathered "in one place together". We don't know exactly where. It could have been somewhere inside or near the Temple in Jerusalem, since right after the fireworks, crowds started to gather. It may have been the same large room where Jesus and the Apostles had eaten the Last Supper. We are not certain. So they were all in one place, and then a thunderous noise like a strong wind, like a tornado, came from the sky and then flames appeared. Flames of fire just appeared out of nowhere, spontaneously, hovering in the air and these flames divided up and started floating through the air until they came to rest on each of the people gathered. But the fireworks didn't stop there. All of a sudden, the Christians started speaking in languages that they didn't know. A crowd had gathered by now, with visitors from all over the world who were in Jerusalem for the festival. Each one heard the Christians explaining the gospel in their own language. It was a dramatic, spectacular display. But we would be wrong to conclude from this that the Holy Spirit's normal way of acting in our life is through dramatic fireworks. In fact, it's just the opposite. God's action in our life is most often gentle and hardly perceptible at first. How did Jesus send the Spirit to his Apostles after his resurrection? He breathes on them - quietly and subtly. How does St Paul describe the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church? Like the soul of a body - powerful, essential, but invisible and subtle. The Holy Spirit works quietly.

Consider the example of Mary. The Bible tells us that Mary was there in the Upper Room, waiting with the Apostles for the coming of the Holy Spirit. She was the mother who had given birth to the head of the Church, Jesus, in Bethlehem and now she is the mother who is helping to give birth to the rest of the body of the Church at Pentecost. What was she doing? Praying with them, certainly. But she was probably also serving them, being a mother to them in the midst of their confusion and nervousness. They probably were asking her about Jesus and listening - maybe for the first time - to the story of his birth and childhood. Maybe this is when they first heard about the Annunciation. That was the day the archangel Gabriel came to her and explained that "The Holy Spirit will overshadow you and you will conceive." She probably told them about the many conversations she had in her heart with the Holy Spirit after that day, the ones St Luke referred to

in his Gospel when he wrote (more than once): "And Mary kept all these things, contemplating them in her heart." This is the key. To contemplate is to go over an idea in the silence of your mind in conversation about it with God and that's what Mary was always doing. Becoming the spouse of the Holy Spirit didn't bring fireworks and fancy balls into her life, it brought meaning, mission, wisdom, courage - virtues that take root and grow in the quiet center of the soul, just as seeds take root and grow in the unseen darkness of the soil. Quiet, gentle, unseen, yet powerful, transforming, and everlasting - that's the work of the Holy Spirit. Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta put it beautifully when she said: "God is the friend of silence. See how nature - trees, flowers, grass - grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls."

There is only one condition attached to this gift. To experience God's transforming presence in our lives, we have to obey his will out of love: "Whoever loves me will keep my word," as Jesus says in the Gospel. All of us here today want to obey God's will in our lives - some want to do so passionately, others reluctantly, but we all want to - otherwise we wouldn't be here. But how do we know what God's will is? The Holy Spirit quietly reveals God's will to us in two ways. First, he inspires and guides the teaching of the Church. We have: the commandments of the Bible, the instructions in the Catechism, the examples of the saints, the regular updates from the pope's encyclicals - the Holy Spirit wants us to know how a Christian should live, and he gives us the Church to keep us posted. In this way, the Church, under the pope's leadership, is like the conductor of a symphony: we have to keep our eyes on him if we want to play our part well. But the Church can only give commandments and guidelines that apply to everyone. That tells God's will 85% of the time. But 15% of the time we are faced with opportunities and challenges unique to our own life-circumstances. That's when the Holy Spirit guides us more personally, through inspirations, through his seven Gifts, through wise advice. My calling to the diaconate was not through any fireworks or the Holy Spirit slapping me on the back of the head saying "listen up dummy!" It was a quiet but strong stirring in my heart that I could not ignore. Through both the Church and personal inspiration the Holy Spirit is hard at work, quietly but surely, building up our happiness and that of those around us. Today let us commit to follow and obey - not in order to experience spiritual fireworks, but in order to feed the fire of God's love in our hearts, whose light and heat we all need so much.