

Solemnity of Pentecost – Cycle C
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – June 9, 2019
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When I was a child, I always enjoyed birthday parties. There was usually some form of entertainment, some games, some balloons, some fun. And whatever else was served, you could always count on cake and ice cream. A birthday party was often the highlight of the week – and when it was your birthday – well, that just made it all the more fun. After all, there were gifts to unwrap and you were the center of attention. Try as we might when we get older, birthday parties are just not the same. No one really wants to play “pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey” anymore. Balloons don’t have the same allure – and with cake and ice cream now come thoughts of calories and fat grams and blood sugar and waistlines. As a child, getting another year older meant getting closer to something better – moving from a tricycle to a bicycle, moving from kindergarten to first grade, getting bigger toys. As an adult, when each year seems to bring a few more aches and pains, being another year older doesn’t quite have the same appeal. Birthdays too often become focused on remembering the past, not looking forward to the future.

We gather today on Pentecost – on the birthday of the Church. Salvation history is often traced to the call of Abraham. The incarnation is the pivotal moment in human history – when our loving God took on human flesh to redeem us all. The life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ that we have been especially celebrating for these past fifty days are all essential moments in our journey of redemption. But the gift of the Holy Spirit, the love and mercy of God poured out on that first Pentecost, bound together that frightened bunch of disciples into one community, into one Church. That’s why we say that the Church was born on Pentecost – because it was on Pentecost when individual followers of Jesus were united by the power of God’s Spirit into Christ’s Mystical Body.

And so as a Church, as the People of God, we celebrate today our birthday. We do so festively – not with the balloons and games of a child’s party, mind you, but in prayer and in song. We may not blow out candles, but we remember rushing wind and tongues of fire. Yes, this is our birthday party, but for those of us who are almost 29, birthdays are not always welcome. They remind us of our age; they remind us of how much we wanted to accomplish with our life so far, and how much we have left to do. Birthdays become more focused upon the past and less focused on the future. Our challenge today, therefore, is to find the right balance. This Pentecost, the Church *is* invited to acknowledge the past, to give thanks for God’s many blessings and to repent of the sinfulness that has too often marked our

history. We are challenged to remember the truth of the gospel that has been handed on to us through Tradition, as well as to work to repair the damage created by past misdeeds. But our observance of the Church's birthday, our celebration of Pentecost is about much more than the past – it must also be about the present and the future.

The Church is continually being invited to a “new Pentecost,” to a renewal – individually, as a Church, and by extension, toward a renewed society. Through the surpassing power of Christ's grace, entrusted to frail human ministers, the Church is constantly reborn and each of us is given the hope of a new beginning. Let us trust in the Spirit's power to inspire conversion, to heal every wound, to overcome every division, and to inspire new life and freedom. Far from dwelling exclusively upon the past, our celebration of Pentecost, our celebration in and of the Holy Spirit, is meant to draw us toward hope – toward that one virtue that constantly leads us forward.

Pentecost should lead us toward a renewed personal conversion. It should serve as a wake-up call that we should dedicate our lives ever more faithfully to hearing and responding to the Good News of Jesus Christ. This personal conversion must be nurtured in prayer, sustained by the Word of God, and nourished by the sacramental life of the Church. But for Catholic Christians, salvation is never just personal. In the responsorial psalm, we invite the Holy Spirit to renew the face of the earth. As that prayer implies, we are called not just to a personal conversion, but as witnesses of God's saving, healing, forgiving power to a Church too often beset by selfishness and hypocrisy, to a community trapped in sin and division, to a nation drowning in violence and apathy, to a world mired in error because it has forsaken the quest for the truth. Like the Apostles and the Blessed Virgin Mary, we are invited to gather anew as a cenacle, as a community of believers in prayer. It is here that the Spirit is once more poured forth into our hearts – but like those first Apostles, the Spirit impels us to open the doors, to spread the message of Jesus Christ to all who would hear. The Holy Spirit calls us to bear witness to our culture, to all who have abandoned God and to those who have never encountered God. The Spirit of the Living God should shine forth in our lives – radiate in all that we say and do. The Spirit should stand as a beacon of life in a culture of death, as a pillar of truth in a storm of confusion, as a fountain of hope to a world parched by despair. As we celebrate the Spirit of God this Pentecost, as we celebrate our birthday, may we do so with the hope that can only be found in Jesus Christ.