

THE SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST RESUMPTION OF ORDINARY TIME

*** THE TENTH WEEK ***

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CELEBRATING PENTECOST IN PRAYER

A reflection by Jurgen Moltmann

“Jesus said: If you love me you will keep my commandments and I will ask the Father to give you another Advocate to be with you forever”. The presence of the Holy Spirit is the most wonderful thing that can happen in response to prayer. This is so for each of us, for the human community, for all living things, and for the earth. The Holy Spirit is God’s self, the God who creates and gives life, the God who redeems and blesses. Because the Holy Spirit has come, the end of the human history of guilt, suffering and death has begun!

What the first Christians experienced at the first Pentecost, according to the Acts of the Apostles, was the first day of the re-creation of the world. It was a pouring out of God’s creative power that gives life eternally, and so it was also a stormy wind and tongues of fire sweeping away all that was old.

This means that what we Christians call “Pentecost” wasn’t an addition to Good Friday or Easter but the very goal of Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection into the glory that will come to us all. In the Holy Spirit God is present in a special way so that we experience God in our lives by a power beyond anything in the depths of our own being. We experience our lives as healed and redeemed, as complete in their entirety and with all that we are. We feel and taste and touch and see our life in God and God in our lives.

There are multiple names for God the Holy Spirit. I think the most beautiful is “comforter” and then comes “source of life”. When we pray for the coming of the Spirit, we open ourselves to God’s expectations of us and we let the energy that is the Spirit flow into us so we can fulfill them. Even if you can as yet only groan for salvation and then be silent, already the Spirit is groaning with & interceding for you. One of the first signs of new life is this praying and groaning for the Spirit to open up our lives of imprisonment in a devastated world to which the Spirit can and will bring a new kind of living.

The response to this prayer is the Spirit’s coming and abiding. The Spirit is poured out and dwells in us. If you pray for the Spirit to come into your heart, into your community, and upon our earth you aren’t seeking to flee into heaven or to be removed to whatever is beyond. You are showing you have received hope for your heart and community and world. We don’t pray, “Let us come into your kingdom...” but “let your kingdom come...” on earth, and abide, as it does in Heaven. This sort of praying is a magnificent affirmation of life. Human beings are fragile, and so is all earthly being, and the Divine Spirit comes to lift all up and make new all that is good, starting with each of us. Then our coming to one another can be a coming of the Holy Spirit.

MARY'S MOTHERHOOD AND OUR VOCATION

Developed from a reflection by Fr. Karl Rahner

Listen to the declaration of the Council of Ephesus: *“We confess our Lord Jesus Christ, the unique Son of God, perfect God and perfect human being, of a rational soul and a body, begotten of the Father before the ages according to Godhead and born in the last days for us and for our salvation of Mary the Virgin according to his humanness. A union of two natures took place. Therefore, we confess one Christ, one Son, one Lord. According to this understanding of the unconfused union, we confess the holy virgin to be “theotokos” (God-bearer) because God the Word was made flesh and lives as a human and from the very conception united to himself the temple taken from her.”*

What the church proclaimed with the words *“born of the virgin Mary”* was solemnly defined and all Christians are called upon to confess their belief in the divine motherhood of the blessed virgin. There can be no genuine Christianity, truly believing in the coming of God himself in human flesh, if this article of faith is no longer held firmly.

Mary appears as a figure in sacred history like Abraham. She is part of the historical dialogue between God and our race. Our salvation depends on her right decision. Upon this we are built as on a foundation. We are told in Scripture: Look, there was a human being to whom an angel came with a mysterious message and this human being said, simply and unreservedly, *“Be it done to me according to your word”*. Through this response the Son of the eternal Father came down to this earth and into our flesh and history. God assumed all this forever in the flesh of his Son.

Mary, by the consent of her faith, became the Mother of God. By the gift of her Son, she became the mother of all who have faith. In this she became the Mother of the Church, the Body of her son. We must never view her motherhood as only something physical or symbolic. It is an integral part of her real, free, personal act of trust in God. When she is given to us, all this is offered to us as well. We can be one with her faith and with her son, just as she is one with Him and with the Heavenly Father who sent him to her, and so to us. The Church strives to live in each of us the same faith that make Mary God's mother. As we live that faith, we too become bearers of God, and to many others as she has become.

The Holy Scripture tells of Mary's divine motherhood and then involves Mary at once and as a matter of course in the tremendous, mysterious, shatteringly great drama that is being acted out between the eternal God and this world with its human race. She shows us the way to enter into that drama ourselves. Jesus, in giving her to us as our mother, shows us that this is God's will for us. If we are Jesus' brothers and sisters, then we are Mary's children. Jesus shows us what God's will for our race and each of us is by showing us Mary and her way of responding to this call. Can we do better than give ourselves to God as Mary does?

ENCOURAGING OTHERS TO LIVE THE BOND OF LOVE

A reflection taken from talks by St. Pope John XXIII

Even among spiritual people there are many opinions and views. The challenge is to see that this doesn't harm charity and peace. We have to act and speak with the sort of moderation of manner that encourages harmony in the service of the Gospel and of all that is good. I will add that the Lord makes use even of misunderstandings among us to bring about some great good in ways far from what we might expect.

Take the instance of the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over the inclusion of young John Mark in their company as they set out again on an evangelical mission. He had been with them before and, in the midst of things, had quit and went home. Now Paul refused to trust him to be a faithful part of this new venture in the apostolate. Barnabas, however, insisted on trusting him. The disagreement got so strong that Paul and Barnabas themselves separated and went on two different missionary ventures.

Beware of misunderstandings! They arise, they present challenges and may even lead to fighting. We must be on our guard against this. If we can't avoid such disagreements, but at least let's not cultivate them. Don't let them get blown up in your imagination. Let's always try to explain them away or heal them in a peaceful way. Let's work especially hard to keep ourselves free of resentments.

Barnabas and Paul were both righteous and holy. We know that Barnabas took John Mark with him and by his trust and confidence in him encouraged him to become a good and effective evangelist. Perhaps it was this example which led Paul to work with him later, and consider him an especially fine and loved collaborator in the work of leading non-Jews to Jesus and the Heavenly Father. In other words, Barnabas was better at clearing away misunderstandings. He showed that Paul's original mistrust was a misunderstanding.

We should never forget the teaching of our Lord that believing and renouncing one's own ways brings more joy and peace than demanding and receiving what we may want. The New Testament tells us the Barnabas' name means "person who encourages" and that he found ways to encourage the early Jerusalem Christian community but selling some land and giving the sale price to the apostles for use in helping the community's poor. Was it due to him that the practice of giving away one's possessions became established in the Church?

Charity is like precious gold, refined in the fire and enriching all who possess it. It spreads love not only among those who receive but among all who observe charity in action. Whatever one offers, if it is offered without charity, is neither pleasing to God nor profitable to self or others. But if we know this, we know also how to encourage others and that the best way is by deeds of charity and love. Every community needs its Barnabas if it is to live in a genuinely Christian way, if its members are to love each other, and all, as Christ loves us. Each of us has received the call to love one another as Barnabas did. We start by encouraging one another by showing what such love can accomplish, even using deeds that seem little and of little importance.

A SCHOOL OF THE LORD'S SERVICE & ITS TEACHERS

A reflection from St. Bernard's third Pentecost Sermon

We know that from the beginning of the human race there have been many who are weighed down by concern for the visible world and for themselves. They disregard the purpose for which we have all been made. Some philosophers, for instance, directed their greatest zeal to investigating the arrangement of created things and led many others to neglect the ways in which things are useful to leading us to God.

People more prudent than these followed them and learned to pass by things that are made and questions about how they were made. It wasn't hidden from them that God made everything for his own purpose and for the good of all who belong to God. He made everything with gratuitous goodness for the benefit of his chosen ones. Spiritual persons use this world as though they weren't using it and seek God in the simplicity of their hearts.

We have much reason to rejoice that such people have led us to give ourselves to the tasks of learning how to serve God and love each other. Fortunate is the one who remains in the dwelling place of wisdom and of the Holy Spirit. It is characteristic of those led by the Spirit to cast away sin and to hate it. Our teachers have been holy persons who showed us how to seek God in a House of the Lord's service. We are the children of these holy ones, especially of those who have walked the monastic way of learning to love God. They have passed on to us their love and dedication to God.

Do you know how to possess yourself in holiness and honor? Is it your will that whatever you want others to do to you, you will also do to them? Through whom did you receive a right spirit for serving your neighbor? The Holy Spirit is bestowed upon human beings for just such reasons. When we were helped to turn with our whole heart to God then the Spirit was given us to heal our weaknesses and give us consolation. The Spirit enkindled in us a mighty flame of love that we might glory only in the hope of being fully children of God. But all this was done by people who went before us in this monastic School of the Lord's service. We pray for them and pray with them so that the Spirit will draw us all together in his eternal Kingdom.

Let us pray that the days of Pentecost will be fulfilled in us as in them. Let us pray that these will be days of forgiveness and days of exultation. Let us pray most of all that these will be days filled with gratitude for those who have been our teachers by their example and manner of life in this our School of the Lord's service. By our oneness of heart may the Holy Spirit make us teachers like those who have now gone before us to God. This is the expression of our vowed stability to the praise and glory of the Church's bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Let's never depart from the way of walking in faith that we were shown by Jesus. Walk in faith and love. Follow those who first steadied your shaky feet so you could walk in this way. May he bring us all together to the House of our Heavenly Father and its eternal peace.

GOD GIVES AN APOSTOLATE TO ALL

A reflection developed from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII

The way we bear witness to God and to God's love revealed in Jesus depends on the way we cultivate the seeds of grace sown in us at our baptism and made fertile by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Everyone felt drawn, and even compelled, by the charm of Anthony's personality. He was perceived as a person who lived for Christ. It seemed a fulfillment of St. Paul's words: "*We are the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved*". The seeds of grace sown in Anthony, bore abundant fruit. Ever faithful to the mark he received by this sacrament, he was transformed into the likeness of God. He was brought "*from one degree of glory to the next, and all of this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit*".

For all of us, fidelity and openness to transformation are essential duties. We are called to live according to the hope given us by the promises made when we were baptized. If we were infants, we didn't know what we were being helped to do but we grew to realize that fidelity to divine grace was being asked of us. It is a grace given so that all may be drawn to Christ. He is the source of life, of purification from all that destroys people, and of perfection in all our human and divine gifts.

Everyone has a personal calling. Everyone should act in accordance with the promptings that flow from this grace. All are called to bear witness to the Divine Founder of Christian faith and to do it in a way that draws others. This is essential to God's life in us human beings. It is the only good path to the great expectations we are taught to place in the life of Heaven. We must have hope. We learn to hope from the hopes of others.

Anthony's mission was preaching. But his preaching was so effective because he mirrored Christ in his living. That he did this in a way that pleased God is witnessed by the extraordinary manifestations of divine power which occurred throughout his life. These were not intended to call us to becoming God's instruments in such a way but to remind us that only a visible presence of grace draws people to Jesus and to God.

All of us are called to share in the work of the Kingdom of Heaven. That is in itself a great privilege and joy. It is a miracle that takes the form of a human life radiating the love of God for all. This is what the Lord, and the Church which is Christ's Body, expects of all those who believe. It is entrusted to you. You are being reminded of this on the feast day of St. Anthony.

Everyone is always able to carry on what is called the apostolate of good example. Our world is filled with bad examples, and with persons who are not at all ashamed to give bad example. The world needs good examples! It needs very good ones! It needs them from all who profess the Christian faith. What a transformation there would be if all two billion Christians gave such an example. Do it without fear and graciously. Seek to spread around you the warmth of your convictions and the serenity of your faith. Then you will be an apostle of Christ's love for our world and the seed of its transformation in Christ.

HOW BROTHERS IN CHRIST HELP ONE ANOTHER

A reflection taken from St. Bernard's Lament for his brother, Gerard

You know how people feel the loss of a brother. A faithful companion has been taken away. The death of my brother is the sign that he is gone to God and for this I rejoice. Yet because his help has been taken from me, and he seemed indispensable and he loved me so well, I sorrow. A brother in religious profession is taken from us and we wonder why. He constantly reminded us that all should be of one mind so as to be able to walk the monastic way together. It is good for such brothers to be together; such companionship is good and pleasant.

We know, however, that a departed brother gains immensely. In place of our company he enjoys the presence of Christ! There is no good reason to complain about physical separation. We complain because we have no one to replace the one who is gone. Are we still in that person's mind? Such questions make us feel a bit lost and distracted. He was so often a staff for us to lean on in time of weakness. Are we permitted to ask such questions about one who has been plunged into the endless depths of Divine Light, submerged in an ocean of everlasting joy?

We know God is charity! The closer one is to God the more one is filled with charity. The love and affection and concern of such a person is farther from us now than it was. These feelings are increased and transformed when a person puts on God in full measure. One can't put aside care for those left behind since God cares for all of them. As charity never fails, so those who go before us to God never forget us.

We certainly know it would not be good for us to forget them. Now they are not here to reach out a helping hand. How often in an emergency we looked for them. At times we forget and do it still, automatically as it were. My brother, Girard, knew so many things! To whom can I go when he is not with us anymore? See how we lean on one another!

The Lord gave Girard a "learned tongue" and much prudence, just as the Lord gives us all many great graces. He was a help to brothers and to strangers. Who was sent away empty handed? He had advice and it brought relief in trials. He didn't seek what was "his own" but what was of the Lord. Like the Lord he surrendered himself to deliver others from cares; he was willing to take on another's care in order to deliver that other from care. Gerard imitated this.

I have been speaking of exterior things, as if you had been inexperienced in the interior life and a stranger to spiritual gifts. But we all knew you were not focused on the flesh but filled with spiritual fervor. You seemed to have a special gift for being alone with God in contemplation. How often we learned from you when we had thought to teach you something. You did not possess a higher education but possessed that intelligence which is the source of spiritual learning as well as the light of the Holy Spirit.

We mourn the departure of a faithful helper and a trustworthy counselor in the things of God. We lament and grieve for one so closely related to us in the Spirit. May the Lord bring us all together soon in the joys of his Kingdom.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE COMFORTED

A reflection by Fr. Romano Guardini

To comfort you must love. You must be open and enter into the other's heart. You must be observant; you must have the free and sensitive heart which finds the paths of life with quiet assurance; you must be able to discover the sore and withered places. You must have subtlety and strength to penetrate to the other's living center, to the deep source of life which has dried up. The heart must make itself one with this source of life in order to summon it to life again and flow through all the deserts and ruins within.

To do this is truly to comfort. To do this is to awaken, to generate, to create. To do this is to call forth the best in another person. Such comfort liberates in the very act of permeating another from, so to speak, within. This releases, supports, and broadens—but in such a way that the other rises again from his or her own true center and makes a fresh beginning.

A person who has been wounded is comforted when another who loves awakens the hidden energy within so that it passes through the wound in a healing stream. A person who is spiritually dried up is comforted when one who loves him or her releases the wave of life within and everything is revived. A person who has lost things of great value, who had had work destroyed and hopes dashed, is comforted when someone who loves allies with something that lies at a deeper level than the loss, that lies underneath what we possessed or deeper than the work destroyed. A comforter allies with innermost soul that is above all change and loss and is the eternal strength of the heart that mourns.

Something has been lost and it must be admitted that, so far as time is concerned, it is gone. Yet in some way what has been lost can be won anew from the timelessness of faith in God. A person whose heart is wounded or sullied is comforted when another who loves is able to touch the purity which lives below sin. Such a person rouses a new confidence that the ugliness can be overcome.

For instance, one who has sinned and can't find an escape from guilt is comforted when another who loves is able to shed light on the sinner's self-deception and release and strengthen the will and open new possibilities. There is comfort when the lover is able to soften what is hardened, touch what is paralyzed and give a new direction to the "lost" mind. Human love, really pure and selfless human love, is able to comfort. But it soon encounters its limits.

Human love isn't the love of God. Christ sent us the One who is the "nearness" between the Heavenly Father and the Son. This One is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the inwardness of God's very self. The Spirit is the secret language of love. The Spirit is the tie and the kiss. In the Spirit God comes to us as comforter. A comforter who has no limit because God's love has none. To whom shall we go when we need a comforter? Turn to God in the Spirit.