



Message for Pentecost 2021

Dear Confreres and Consoeurs of the Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem,

Pentecost is the feast of the Spirit, the gift *par excellence* of the Risen One, spread with abundance on the community of first believers and is given to us to strengthen us in the demanding task of freeing the world from diseases and all forms of evil and to make us aware that we are children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Holy Spirit constitutes the soul, the lifeblood of the Church and of every single Christian: it is the Love of God which makes our hearts His home and enters into communion with us. The Holy Spirit is always with us, always in us, in our hearts. The profound mystery of the Spirit is to be a "gift".

The Holy Spirit is the gift of full life; the gift of love which we would not otherwise be able to show in our lives; the gift of joy which would be absent from our lives; the gift that allows us to breathe in communion with our brothers and sisters, confessing with them one faith and one hope; the gift that makes us speak on behalf of all creatures with a voice that praises and confesses the Creator and Lord.

Christian life, in order to develop and mature, requires special assistance from the Holy Spirit and his gifts. St Augustine affirms that *"the Holy Spirit is God's gift to all who love God through him"*.

The Spirit himself is God's "gift" (*cf. Jn 4:10*) and, in turn, communicates different spiritual gifts to those who receive Him. The Church identifies seven of them, a number that symbolically says fullness and completeness. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are: wisdom, intellect, counsel, fortitude, science, piety and fear of God. Attributed in the first instance to the Messiah (*Cf. Is 11:1-2*) in whom they are realized in fullness, these gifts perfect the virtues of the baptized, making us meek and obedient to follow the motions of the Spirit.

- The gift of wisdom allows us to taste the presence of God and introduces us to the contemplation of God's love for us.
- The gift of the intellect makes us penetrate the depths of God's plan of salvation with the eyes of faith and introduces us to God's intuitive experience.
- The gift of counsel helps us to know God's judgment in human affairs in the light of his Word and is a strong support in the practice of discernment.
- The gift of fortitude makes us faithful and persevering in faith and helps us to go against the current with respect to passing fashions and the worldly mentality and to be courageous witnesses of the Gospel.

- The gift of science makes us evaluate reality starting from the encounter with Christ and helps us to interpret the signs of the times and grasp the seeds of the Word present in reality.
- The gift of piety arouses in us the need to entrust ourselves to the Father who is rich in mercy, stimulates our prayers of thanksgiving and praise and makes us available to the needs of others.
- The gift of God's holy fear is not fear of God, but gratitude to be under God's gaze; it is the awareness of being enveloped by God's embrace.

To the extent that we accept the gifts of the Spirit, we are called to realize in our lives what Saint Paul calls in his letter to the Galatians "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22). The various facets of the one fruit of the Spirit are: the love of God and neighbour infused by the Holy Spirit, soul and foundation of all virtues; full joy capable of overcoming all tribulations; peace, the fruit of justice; the patience from which perseverance derives; the benevolence that makes us more affectionate, kind, capable of encouraging, consoling; the goodness that makes us magnanimous and merciful towards others; the fidelity that makes us reliable people for God and for others; the meekness that makes us act with love and humility in any situation and makes us resist evil; the domination of oneself that does not enslave us to the desires of the flesh and makes us live the freedom of God's children.

In this period of pandemic, we must allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, who enables us to overcome all fear and makes us capable of making our lives a gift of love that even conquers the dread of death.

+ Michele Pennisi
Archbishop of Monreale & Ecclesiastical Grand Prior

Monreale, Pentecost 2021