

LESSON. *Acts 2: 1-11.* When the days of Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together in one place: and suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak. Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men of every nation under heaven. And when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded in mind, because that every man heard them speak in his own tongue. And they were all amazed and wondered, saying: Behold, are not all these that speak Galileans? And how have we heard every man our own tongue wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and inhabitants of Mesopotamia, and Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphilia, Egypt, and the parts of Lybia about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome; Jews also, and proselytes, Cretes, and Arabians: we have heard them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.

1. HOMILETIC SKETCH.

THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY GHOST.

Our Blessed Lord had frequently, but especially just before his Ascension into heaven, promised his Apostles that he would send them the Holy Ghost. "John indeed," he said to them, "baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. . . . You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you."—*Acts 1: 5-8.* On this day this promise was fulfilled. The Holy Ghost came down upon the Apostles and the Christians, and imparted to them the gifts of

his grace. Let us make this grand mystery the subject of our meditation according to the lesson of this day and propose to ourselves the three following questions :

- I. When, where, and on whom did the Holy Ghost descend?*
- II. How did he come down?*
- III. What effect has his coming produced?*

PART I.

When the days of Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together in one place. Here St. Luke tells us—

1. *At what time the Holy Ghost came down.* This event took place on the day of Pentecost. The Jews had their Pentecost, and it was one of their principal festival days. They celebrated it, as we do, fifty days after Easter, hence the name *Pentecost*, which means the *fiftieth day*. The Jewish Pentecost had been instituted, first, in thanksgiving for the harvest, which began with Easter and ended fifty days afterwards; secondly, in memory of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, which occurred fifty days after their first Easter in Egypt or after their departure from it. In this double relation the Jewish Pentecost is a type of the Christian. The Christian Pentecost is, as it were, a harvest-home in a spiritual sense, for on this day the Church of Christ was introduced into the world and three thousand believers were added to its fold. In like manner it is a feast of legislation, because on it, the New Law, the Christian religion, was for the first time preached at Jerusalem by the Apostles filled with the Holy Ghost. The day of our baptism was for us the gracious day on which we were introduced into the Church of Christ. What does our conscience tell us? Have we been thankful for this unmerited grace of God and have we always faithfully fulfilled our duties as Catholics?

2. *Where did the Holy Ghost come down?* "*In one place.*" What place was it? It was undoubtedly that upper room or *Cænaculum* in Jerusalem where Christ on the eve of his sacred passion ate the Last Supper with his disciples. After the death of their Master the Apostles were generally here, the doors being closed for fear of the Jews; here, in prayer, they expected the Holy Ghost according to the instruction received from their divine Master. Solitude and prayer are two of the principal means whereby we receive the Holy Ghost with his graces. The Holy Ghost loves solitude, and honors with his presence only those souls whose pleasure it is to lead a retired life; consequently he

finds not indwelling and adoration in the hearts of those who give themselves to the distractions of a worldly life and are found in places of amusement. Hence we see that all the saints, in whose hearts the Holy Ghost produced great things, loved solitude, and that many of them left the world and embraced the monastic life. Avoid all unnecessary intercourse with the world and its frivolous and immoral pleasures; lead as much as possible a retired life, that the Holy Ghost may abide with you. Make use of prayer, for "your Father from heaven will give the good Spirit to them that ask him."—*Luke 11: 13.*

3. *On whom did the Holy Ghost descend? On all those who were together in one place.* The *Cænaculum* in Jerusalem represents to us the whole Church of Christ; for here were assembled the Apostles, Mary the Virgin Mother of God, and the other believers, in all about a hundred and twenty persons. Since only those received the Holy Ghost, the important truth is indicated that the Holy Ghost dwells and dispenses his graces only in the Holy Catholic Church, founded by Jesus Christ. As the dove which Noe sent forth from the ark found no place where to rest (*Gen. 8: 9*), so the Holy Ghost will abide with, purify and sanctify men nowhere but in the Catholic Church. What a blessing that we are children of the Catholic Church! Let us appreciate this grace above all things, and let us pray for the conversion of heretics and infidels.

PART II.

How did the Holy Ghost descend?

1. *Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.* That sound was not natural, for it came suddenly, not beginning gently; it came from heaven, that is, from above, whence no storm arises. In this sudden sound we see intimated how the Holy Ghost is accustomed to act; men entirely infatuated and buried in temporal things he often transforms in a moment into enlightened and spiritual beings. Examples: St. Paul, St. Magdalen, and many others. "Oh what a Master is the Holy Ghost; he needs no time for anything he wishes to teach; by touching a soul he teaches; to touch and to teach are one and the same thing; for as soon as he enlightens the human heart he changes its desires, he removes at once what was, and gives what was not."—*St. Gregory the Great.*

2. The sound filled the whole house and thence spread through all Jerusalem; a great multitude of people gathered together to

see what was the matter. Hereby the mysterious operation of the Holy Ghost in the Church is pointed out, from which his graces flow upon all the nations of the earth.

3. *The sound resembled a mighty wind coming.* The wind is swift, hurrying in a few minutes to far distant places. Thus Christianity was spread with wonderful rapidity over the whole earth. In the time of the Apostles numerous congregations of Christians were everywhere formed, and after a few years, not only thousands, but millions of Jews and heathens entered the Christian Church. The mighty wind coming also signifies the irresistible power with which the Christian religion overcame all obstacles in its way, Jews and Gentiles resisting and straining every nerve to hinder its propagation, nay, to destroy it. But their exertions were in vain. After three hundred years they were conquered, their temples crumbled into dust, and the cross triumphed. Equally as powerful and wonderful was the influence of the Christian religion in the hearts of men, subduing their evil passions, extirpating sins and vices, planting the most exalted virtues, and renewing the face of the earth. *And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them.*

4. These tongues, resembling flames of fire, were not the Holy Ghost himself, but only a visible form under which he manifested himself. The Holy Ghost appeared in the form of fire, to signify that he and his essence are love; that he inflames the hearts of men with the fire of charity, and that the Christian Law rests on the love of God and of our neighbor. The Holy Ghost in the form of fire also indicates the effects which he produces in the hearts of men. Fire purifies, illuminates, ignites and unites. The Holy Ghost does all this. He purifies the soul from the stains of sin; he enlightens the understanding with the knowledge of what is unto salvation; he inflames the will for the love of God and of our neighbor; he causes us to disdain earthly things and to fix our affections on things above; finally, he unites the soul with himself and imparts to it his graces in such a manner that by perfect love it becomes one with him. How fervently should we desire these graces, and having received them, how carefully should we strive to preserve them!

5. *The Holy Ghost appeared in the form of tongues.* This signifies the gift of tongues which the Holy Ghost imparted to the Apostles and afterwards to many missionaries. The tongues were *parted*. These parted tongues symbolize the variety of gifts which flow to the faithful through the Holy Ghost.—*I. Cor. 12: 8-11.* The sitting of the tongues, as it were, on every one of

them, signifies the continuance of the Holy Ghost with the Apostles and the Church, as Christ himself says: "I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you for ever."—*John* 14: 16.

PART III.

In the lesson of this day we are told what effects the Holy Ghost produced in the Apostles and the other believers: *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak.*

1. St. Luke first speaks of the effects of grace in general, saying, *they were all filled with the Holy Ghost*. Hereby he expresses that the Apostles received the Holy Ghost in his plenitude. They had already received the Holy Ghost at their baptism, and when Christ invested them with the power of forgiving sin; not however in his plenitude and with all the effects of his grace; but now they received him in a superabundant measure. Hitherto, they were not docile, and could not understand many things which Christ taught, now they were so enlightened in divine things that they confounded all the wisdom of the learned. Hitherto they were timid, and dared not appear among the Jews; now they had a courage which no threat, no persecution, no martyrdom, nor even death could intimidate. Hitherto they were infected with various faults; now they were free from imperfections and showed themselves to be models of sanctity.

2. A special gift which the Holy Ghost imparted to the Apostles, is *the gift of tongues*. All at once they spoke various languages which they had never learned, and they not only understood one another, but they were also understood by others. This gift of languages was necessary to them for their high calling, for, according to the commission of Christ they were to preach the gospel to all the nations of the earth. We need not assume that the Apostles always spoke and understood the languages which they spoke on Whitsunday; but this much is certain that through the Holy Ghost they always could speak those languages which, in the preaching of the gospel among the people of any nation, were necessary for them. Many preachers of the faith, after the Apostolic age, possessed this same gift of languages. St. Irenæus says that he himself heard many speak divers languages, which the Holy Ghost had taught them. St. Pachomius obtained after three hours' prayer the gift of speaking in the Latin language with a brother from Rome. St. Dominic, by fervent prayer, obtained for himself and his companions the gift of the German language in order to be able to preach the gospel to the Germans. It is a well known and

authenticated fact that St. Francis Xavier spoke the languages of various nations which he had never learned, as fluently and correctly as if he had been born and educated in them. If we had no other proof of the truth and divinity of our holy Catholic faith than the gift of languages, which the Church enjoyed from the beginning, this alone ought to suffice, for the gift of languages convinces us that the Holy Ghost has been operating in the Catholic Church at all times.

3. We are also told what effects the descent of the Holy Ghost, which was accompanied by so many miracles, had on the others who were present. Ever since the Assyrian captivity, which had taken place more than seven hundred years previously, and the Babylonian captivity, a hundred years later, many of the Jews were dispersed and resided among various nations and spoke their languages. Many of these Jews came to Jerusalem, not only at Easter, but also at Pentecost and the feast of tabernacles, according to the Law, to adore God in the temple. When these Jews who had come from foreign lands heard the sound of the mighty wind coming, and the inspired discourses of the Apostles in foreign languages, they were very much astonished, and said: *Are not all these that speak, Galileans? And how have we heard every man our own tongue wherein we were born?* Peter arose, and explained to the astonished multitudes the significance of the wonder of the day, and exhorted them in words piercing heart and soul to do penance. The sermon of St. Peter was crowned with the most brilliant success, for three thousand were converted, embraced the Christian faith and were baptized.

PERORATION.

I have now explained to you the contents of the lesson for this festival. The same Holy Ghost that on the first Christian Pentecost, over eighteen hundred years ago, descended on the Apostles and the other believers and filled them with his gifts, dwells to-day in the holy Catholic Church and imparts to us in her and through her, his graces. He enlightens us, that we may know what is good and pleasing to God; he strengthens us, that we may fulfil the duties of religion and of our state of life, and serve God in every situation of life; he sanctifies us in the sacraments and makes us children of God and heirs of heaven. Let us avail ourselves of these graces with fervor and fidelity, **that with the aid of them we may work out our salvation. Amen.**