

## A Gift Beyond Price

This Sunday, we celebrate the great Feast of Pentecost; the coming of the Holy Spirit. In a Pentecost homily, St John Chrysostom said the following: 'Not long ago, we celebrated the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and then His Ascension into heaven. Today, we have reached the supreme and final grace, the most important feast, the actual fulfillment of the Lord's promise.'

Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, a Carmelite priest, put it this way:

*Pentecost is the plenitude of God's gift to man. The Father and the Holy Spirit loved us to the point of giving the Word in the Incarnation; the Father and the Word so loved us as to give us the Holy Spirit. Thus the three Persons of the Trinity give Themselves to man, stooping to this poor nothing to redeem him from sin, to sanctify him, and to bring him into their own intimacy. Such is the excessive charity with which God has loved us; and the divine gift to our souls reaches its culminating point in the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the Gift par excellence.*

Considering the enormity of God's gift to us, it is amazing that, in North America, Pentecost is not given much attention. It may be celebrated in the Church, but, in most of society, it goes unnoticed. However, in Europe, it seems that Pentecost is given much more importance if my memories of Pentecost are any indication. I have several memories of Pentecost but one stands out.

In 2011, I was in Rome in early June. The Feast of Pentecost was approaching and I noticed in a travel guide in the hotel room that, at the Pantheon after Mass on Pentecost Sunday, a shower of rose petals would fall on the congregation.

The Pantheon is a former pagan temple that was given to the Catholic Church. Unlike most churches that are built in the shape of a cross, the Pantheon is circular. The entire church is covered by a concrete dome with an opening in the middle called the *oculus*. The opening, which is the only source of light, is 43.3 metres (142 feet) above the floor of the church.

On Pentecost Sunday, after the Mass, Roman firemen go up on the roof with bags of red rose petals and start emptying the bags through the *oculus*. The rose petals shower down on the people who have been waiting for several hours for this. It is a wonderful image of the first Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles like tongues of fire that came to rest on the head of each of them.

Such is how the Feast of Pentecost is celebrated in Italy. And I have other memories of the celebrations of *Pfingsten* in Germany and Central Europe.

In the Scriptures, we read two accounts describing the coming of the Holy Spirit to the apostles. St. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, described the event like a sound and light show with a violent wind and tongues of fire. (Acts 2: 2, 3) St. John recorded the event in peaceful tones. Jesus came to the apostles and said: 'Peace be with you.' And then He gently breathed the Holy Spirit into them. (Jn 20: 21, 22)

We read two vastly different reports. Which of them is true? In the end, it doesn't matter. The apostles received the great Gift, a gift beyond price. And this Gift has been passed on through the centuries and conferred on us through our Baptism and Confirmation.

The real questions are: what are we doing with the Gift? Are we allowing the Holy Spirit to impact our lives? St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians wrote: 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.' (1Cor 12: 7) Are we using the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the good of others?