



Homily for 5/31/2020

Pentecost Sunday, Ordinary Form

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL

It is good to see you. We are grateful for the return of public Masses, and we rejoice that it comes on this feast of Pentecost. This is the birthday of the Church. This year the pangs of birth have been felt anew and even stronger. And it is not yet over. This is only the beginning of a phased reopening of our society after a long quarantine. The specter of coronavirus is still with us and still threatens the more vulnerable among us. We have taken many prudent measures to prevent its spread. Measures that at times feel like a cross. It is not pleasant to wear a mask. It is awkward to keep the recommended distance from others. We wonder if there is enough hand sanitizer available in the world for the many ablutions we are called to endure. But we gratefully, humbly, and joyfully bear the cross of obedience for the sake of being in the presence of God and to be renewed by this presence with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We spend this birthday acknowledging that we still have a long way to go. There are many of our number still at home. But we acknowledge that we are one even when we are separated. The Holy Spirit we celebrate today unites us. We also recognize that there are many who are struggling with illnesses of all sorts. Our human bodies still bear the mortal burden of this world. But not just our bodies suffer. Our souls are wounded too. Our society is also suffering. We are not well. This virus has tested us, and we are seeing that we are not as strong as we thought. Now the ugly reality of an act of police brutality has shaken us to the core. The despicable actions of a few have caused a general protest against all who enforce our laws. Even last night, our city kept an anxious vigil as many took to the streets in protest. We must fight the wrongs in our society and address head on realities such as police brutality. We cannot simply dismiss it. But in reality it brings us back to that same conclusion. We are broken. And in the end, we cannot fix ourselves. We are helpless, like addicts to our worldly ways, and we have to admit our powerlessness over these issues that face us.

What are we to make of all these “signs of the time”? It should be a wake up call for us and a renewal and a refocus on what really matters. That is why it is good that we are here today. The world is still broken. But into this broken world comes a ray of light. It comes by way of the very thing we do here. Whenever the Holy Sacrifice of the New Covenant is re-presented anew at Mass, a healing power is unleashed. This application of the saving sacrifice to our present time and circumstances is like a stitch binding up the wound of broken humanity. It is the balm of Grace that saves us, and a Grace is poured out in abundance to humble and contrite hearts who know they are not worthy that He should enter under their roof, but who also know that with only a word from the Almighty, even that most broken and wounded soul can be healed.

I just read an article written by Cardinal Sarah, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, where he spoke of perhaps a “silver lining” of sorts in this present crises. This can be a time of renewal for us: a wake up call, a purification. I will let Cardinal Sarah speak:

“The Christian people found themselves in the situation of the Hebrew people in exile, deprived of worship. The prophet Ezekiel teaches us the spiritual meaning of this suspension of Hebrew worship. We need to reread this Old Testament book whose words are very topical. The chosen people did not know how to offer a truly spiritual worship to God, affirms the prophet. They turned to idols. "His priests violated my law and desecrated my sanctuaries; between the sacred and the profane, they did not make a difference and they did not teach to distinguish the impure and the pure, ... and I was dishonored among them..." (Ez 22,26) Then the glory of God deserted the temple of Jerusalem (Ez 10:18).

But God does not take revenge. If He lets natural disasters happen to his people, it is always to better educate them and offer them a deeper grace of alliance. (Ez 33, 11) During the exile, Ezekiel teaches the people the methods of a more perfect worship, of a more true worship. (Ez chap 40 to 47). The prophet suggests a new temple from which



flows a river of living water (Ez 47: 1). This temple symbolizes, foreshadows, and announces the pierced Heart of Jesus, the true temple. This temple is served by priests who will have no inheritance in Israel, no land in private property. “You will not give them heritage in Israel, I will be their heritage” (Ez 44:28), says the Lord. I believe we can apply these words of Ezekiel to our time. We also did not differentiate between the sacred and the profane.

Today, through an illness that He did not positively want, God offers us the grace to feel how much we miss our churches. God offers us the grace to experience that we need this house where he resides in the middle of our towns and villages. We need a place, a sacred building ... reserved exclusively for God. We need a place that is more than just a functional space for gathering and cultural entertainment. A church is a place where everything is oriented towards the glory of God, the worship of his majesty. Is it not time, by re-reading the book of Ezekiel, to regain the sense of sacredness?”

Cardinal Sarah continues:

“The loss of communion has been a deep suffering for many of the faithful. I know it and I want to tell them my deep compassion. Their suffering is proportional to their desire. We believe it: God will not leave this desire for him unfulfilled... But the situation of Eucharistic famine can lead us to a salutary awareness. So many times we have communicated through habit and routine, without preparation or thanksgiving. Communion is not a right, it is a free grace that God offers us. This time reminds us that we should tremble with gratitude and fall on our knees before Holy Communion.” (<https://gospelbaze.com/letter-from-cardinal-robert-sarah-on-catholic-worship-in-these-times-of-trial/>)

It is this faith that has inspired us to persevere through our quarantine and which will sustain us as we confront the ills and evils of our day. And so renewed by the Holy Spirit of God whom we celebrate today, we cry out, “Hope in God I will praise him still, my Savior and my God!”

May Jesus Christ be praised!