

Pentecost 2020

The Liturgy for Pentecost includes the singing of a Sequence right before the Alleluia and the Gospel. Its title is *Veni, Sancte, Spiritus - Come, Holy Spirit, Come*. It was written in the Middle Ages. We hear it sung every year, but I wonder how many of us have taken the time to really reflect on the words. I know that I have not until this year. Perhaps because we have been experiencing so much loss, sorrow, and sadness, the Sequence really spoke to me this Pentecost.

I quoted the beginning of it in my Friday letter and wrote:

I find great comfort in this beautiful ancient hymn. At Pentecost we celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and upon the Church. Indeed, we celebrate the ongoing and uninterrupted gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling in our world, in our Church, and in each one of us.

The ancient author invites us to call upon the Holy Spirit in the midst of this pandemic. *Come, Holy Spirit, come. Fill us with divine light. Comfort us in our present distress. Refresh us in our weariness. Cool us from the heat of suffering. Grant us solace in our pain and sorrow. Enlighten our hearts and souls.*

I pray that the feast of Pentecost will be a true moment of grace for all of us and that it will fill our hearts and souls with comfort, consolation, and peace. I also pray that we will be strengthened by the Holy Spirit and filled with hope knowing that God is with us standing by our side with divine assistance.

Today I want to highlight a different part of the Sequence:

While the verses I quoted in my letter on Friday spoke to me of the Holy Spirit's power to comfort, refresh, console, and heal from the distress and sorrow of the global pandemic, these verses speak to me of something equally as important and needed. They speak about the Holy Spirit's power to heal the wounds of sin. They speak of the fallen condition of humanity and the need for conversion, redress of wrongs, change of heart and will, and réconciliation. "Heal our wounds, our strength renew; on our dryness pour your dew. Wash the stains of guilt away. Bend the stubborn heart and will; melt the frozen, warm the chill; guide the steps that go astray."

The coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc in our world. It has taken hundreds of thousands of lives, sickened countless others, separated loved ones from one another, and ruined economies. It has left us fearful and mourning so many losses.

But our world and nation are experiencing an even more dangerous foe. That evil foe is man's inhumanity to man. It goes by many names: hatred, injustice, prejudice, racism, white supremacy, greed, violence, war, xenophobia, intolerance, abortion, capital punishment, sex trafficking, pornography, sexual abuse of the innocent, sexual harassment, murder, and by so many other names.

Evil is real. Sin is real. On this Pentecost Sunday we call on the Holy Spirit to take the stain of sin away and to transform our hearts and wills. Come, Holy Spirit, bend our stubborn hearts and wills, melt our frozen hearts. Inflammé our hearts, minds, and souls to work for justice and to rid our world of the evil of racism, prejudice, hatred and violence in all its forms.

The deaths of Ahmaud Arbery here in Georgia and of George Floyd in Minneapolis are recent examples of the evil that exists in the hearts of too many and the terrible repercussions of such heinous acts of violence.

This week the United States Bishops Council issued a statement responding to the death of George Floyd and the resulting national protests. The Bishops wrote:

We are broken-hearted, sickened, and outraged to watch another video of an African American man being killed before our very eyes. What's more astounding is that this is happening within mere weeks of several other such occurrences. This is the latest wake-up call that needs to be answered by each of us in a spirit of determined conversion.

As we anticipate the Solemnity of Pentecost this weekend, we call upon all Catholics to pray and work toward a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray for a supernatural desire to rid ourselves of the harm that bias and prejudice cause. We call upon Catholics to pray to the Holy Spirit for the Spirit of Truth to touch the hearts of all in the United States and to come down upon our criminal justice and law enforcement systems. Finally, let each and every Catholic, regardless of their ethnicity, beg God to heal our deeply broken view of each other, as well as our deeply broken society.

I would also add that we pray to the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds as we read and study about the history of racism in our country and the injustice and pain that African Americans have suffered for centuries. We have an obligation to educate ourselves about racism and to speak out against it and the resulting discrimination, prejudice, and persecution of our brothers and sisters.

In our first reading we are told that on that first Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles and disciples of Jesus like a strong driving wind and that tongues as of fire appeared over their heads. They were filled with power and went forth from the place they were to preach the mighty acts of God.

They emerged from the upper room transformed by the coming of the Holy Spirit and went forth courageously into the world to transform and renew it with the presence of Christ. May we, too, be filled with power and go forth to transform and renew our world. May we bravely and loudly speak out against all injustices and work tirelessly to end injustice and violence in all its forms. We have been commissioned by Christ himself to build the Kingdom of God here in this world, a Kingdom of justice and peace, of equality and respect and reverence for all life and for God's creation. Today on this Pentecost we cry out Come, Holy Spirit, Come. Empower us to make your Kingdom a reality.

