

Come Holy Spirit!

It's **Pentecost!** The "**Birthday of the Church**"! A celebration of the time when Jesus **breathed** on His followers in the Upper Room, giving them the **fullness** of the Holy Spirit.

Didn't the Holy Spirit exist before then? Of course! Weren't some Jewish Believers gifted with the Holy Spirit before Pentecost? Again, yes, but just like the coming of the Son of God, there was an appointed time for the Spirit to be sent to Earth in a **special** way.

By receiving the Spirit's **fullness**, Christ's followers **changed** from cringing and fearful men and women – from common fishermen and workers – to **bold**, dynamic "Fishers of Men"!

Remember how they **hid** in that Upper Room, **whimpering** like nervous mice afraid of the cat?

And **then** they received the Holy Spirit ... and **all** the Spirit's Gifts.

No longer hiding and afraid of the authorities, they became more like lions ... **roaring** out the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

They **immediately** went down to the crowded streets and began preaching the **message** ... a message intended to reach every corner of the world.

Even today, each of us **needs** the Holy Spirit to come ... bringing us His gifts ... and we need to **use** those Gifts ... Gifts we were meant to **share** with the whole world!

Are we preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ?

I don't mean **here** ... at Mass ... where I stand and preach and you sit and listen.

Do we – do you **and** I – tell **others** about the Church that Christ established here on Earth two thousand years ago? The **same** Church that we belong to here in Bartlett, Tennessee?

What did Jesus send His followers out to do?

To save the world!!!

Maybe you're shy about telling anyone else about your Catholic faith, afraid that you'll be attacked for the things that are **wrong** with the Church today.

This being the Birthday of the Church, I'd like to point out some things that are **right** about the Church.

We have **plenty** of people telling us about everything that's **wrong**.

In the most **inopportune** of moments, and in the most **inappropriate** of ways, they tell us what's **wrong** in the Catholic Church. There are moments and places that **are** appropriate for criticism, but critics seem to enjoy the **public** stage, more to satisfy their own egos than to find effective and constructive avenues to effect changes in the Church.

There are also those who proclaim that they don't go to church because of all the **hypocrites** they claim attend Mass. In other words, **you and I** are all a bunch of sinners and hypocrites and the critics don't want to be seen with us! Yes, we **are** sinners, but out of God's love for us we are being redeemed. So to those detractors who call us hypocrites for coming to Mass, I defer to advice columnist Abigail Van Buren who often told her correspondents: "A church is a **hospital** for sinners, not a **museum** for saints."

So ... at least once a year on what is considered to be the Church's birthday – that is, Pentecost – and in the interest of fairness ... we ought to take a look at what is **right** with the Church. After all, one doesn't attend a birthday party just so they can tell all of the other guests about what's **wrong** with the guest of honor!

The first thing that's **right** about the Church is that she is **God's** creation ... **not** the result of mere **human** action, a construction of human hands and intellect. She is **not** simply a voluntary association of like-minded individuals who have banded together to form a legal and political entity known as the Catholic Church.

Secondly, The Church has a **mission**, a **purpose** given to her by God. She has a **clear** self-identity and a **fixed** purpose. Her mission is **universal** and is communicated to people of **every** race, nationality and tongue. She speaks fiery words of love, of challenge, and of vision. She speaks in words that can be understood by people of **every** age, culture, and continent. She **needs** to say the same thing **over** and **over** ... and **over** ... again until we finally “**get it.**” And she needs to **proclaim** her message in language and imagery that is inspiring, illuminating, encouraging, comforting ... and yet challenging.

Next, the Church is a **community**, a family, a place where individuality and personal rights are **balanced** in a **common** good, in commonly shared rights and responsibilities, much like in a family. Families are places where individual personalities are formed and shaped in their relationships with others. One finds out **who** one **is** by belonging to a family.

And the Church is directed **outward**, toward others. She needs to be an **outreaching** family, living out concerns for the marginalized, the oppressed, the dispossessed, and the little ones, however hidden and unrecognized they may be by modern society. She needs to be a community in which homilies are not simply **preached** but actually **lived**. The Church is that privileged place where God's spoken **Word** is **received** in the way we act on it, not by simply **listening** to it.

The Church **needs** to be, and in fact **is**, the continuation of that body of disciples who first followed Jesus, who listened to what Christ had to say and then put His teachings into practice. Our Church strives mightily to remain fully integrated with the Church of the Apostles, to retain the integrity and the truthfulness of full integration with the Mystical Body of the Risen Christ.

There **are** things that are wrong among Catholics and in the Catholic Church itself. Certainly our Pope has made that known! There are **attitudes** and **structures** that need to be changed ... but that's the way it has always been in our Church from its very beginning, from the time when Peter and Paul had to settle their differences about whether or not non-Jews could be members of the Church.

Diversity and dialogue have brought life to the Church from its very inception. Perhaps there is something wonderfully **right** about our internal differences. Perhaps there's something wonderfully **right** in our differences, and even in our disagreements. Perhaps that dynamic allows us to turn to the Holy Spirit so that we might continually be re-shaped, molded, and re-formed as God would have us.

Finally, we might even say the Church's birthday party is **not** yet over, and never will be, because God's Church is **continually** being reborn, renewed, and raised up in a never-ending cycle of passion, suffering, death, and resurrection.

So ... in spite of what all of the critics are saying ... there's a whole lot that's **right** about the Church and that being in the Church is actually a **good** place to be.

Hopefully that's why **you're** here today.

That's **exactly** why **I'm** here.