

Today we're celebrating the great Feast of Pentecost, which formally marks the end of the Easter season and is a celebration of the Holy Spirit's descent upon the Apostles who were then empowered with Heavenly grace to go out and courageously proclaim the Gospel with love and joy to every corner of the known world.

The Feast of Pentecost is traditionally known as the "birthday of the Catholic Church"—so happy birthday! And Pentecost is known by this title because it's really the first time the Church is publicly manifested to the world. In the first reading, we heard of the mysterious events of Pentecost as told to us by St. Luke in his book, the Acts of the Apostles, which is really the sequel to his Gospel. These events of Pentecost marked the official beginning of the Apostolic mission that was entrusted to the 12 by the risen Christ Himself before He ascended into Heaven.

So since Pentecost is known as the "birthday of the Catholic Church," I think the next practical and logical question is: well what *is* the Catholic Church? Well for starters, the word "Catholic" is derived from the ancient Greek word *katholikos*, which simply means

“universal.” So whenever we say, “the *Catholic* Church” we’re really saying the “*Universal*” Church. As we’ve learned from the account of Pentecost, Christ’s Church is entrusted with a truly global and universal mission that includes all peoples and nations of every language and culture! In fact, one of the unique gifts that the Holy Spirit gave to the 12 Apostles on Pentecost was the ability to speak multiple foreign languages—I’d love that gift!

And so St. Luke tells us in his account that after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the 12 Apostles, they went out into Jerusalem, which was truly a global city for its own time, almost like NYC. And on top of that, Jerusalem at the time was filled with pilgrims from all over the Jewish diaspora who had come to the holy city to celebrate the *Jewish feast of Pentecost*, which fell 50 days after Passover and was considered a harvest festival that commemorated the divine revelation of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. So this historical context for Pentecost is important to keep in mind.

So the Apostles, after having received the Holy Spirit, go out into the city and begin courageously proclaiming the Gospel in multiple

foreign languages! Getting back to the term “Catholic,” which means “universal,” we understand the significance of the preaching of the Apostles at Pentecost. Christ’s Church is intended to encompass *every* corner of the globe—*all* people, from *every* race, ethnicity, and nation are invited into a personal and intimate relationship with Christ our Savior *in and through His Catholic Church*. *Nobody* is excluded from the saving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ! And so the Catholic Church, properly understood, is not *just* the Vatican in Rome—the Church is not merely a human institution, but rather the Church is the *Mystical Body of Christ* that is comprised of all the baptized faithful who embrace the Catholic and Apostolic faith. We are all members of the Body of Christ, which is His Catholic Church.

In understanding this wonderful truth, we see the great wisdom of God who established the Church in accordance with our human nature. God created us for *relationship*—relationship with Him and with other human beings. As human beings, we’re social creatures who naturally yearn for relationship with God and others. And so as Catholics we all

share and enjoy a mutual personal relationship with the Son of God *in and through* His Church, which is God's family.

Lastly, it's St. Paul, who in the second reading today, identifies *the Church with Christ Himself* when he describes the Church *as the Body of Christ*. For St. Paul and indeed for all of us, Christ is *absolutely inseparable* from His Catholic Church! This is why statements like "I love Jesus, but I hate the Church" are absolutely absurd in the sense that it's a blatant contradiction. That's like saying "I love water, but I hate drinking it." I mean it makes no sense, especially given that it was *Jesus Himself* Who established the Catholic Church to continue His mission of redemption for all people until the end of time. So brothers and sisters, we're all members of the Catholic Church, this wonderful, imperfect, dysfunctional family that was established by God Himself in order to proclaim His saving love and mercy to all people.

And so I think we should ask ourselves in the context of our second reading today from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians: What are we practically and specifically doing as disciples to build up and support the Body of Christ, the Church? Do we strive to

evangelize? Are we lovingly placing our wonderful gifts and talents at the service of Christ and His Church? Brothers and sisters, God has blessed us with so many spiritual and natural gifts and talents. We're never too young or too old to use our gifts and talents to lovingly build up the Body of the Christ and humbly serve our Savior and His Church.

In a few moments, we'll come before our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, which truly unites us in the Catholic Church. Together, as the Church, we are centered on Christ our Savior—this is why the Blessed Sacrament is positioned in the center of sanctuary. The Church is not centered on me, or Fr. Tom, or Fr. Guency or anyone else! The Church is centered on Christ! As we prepare to worship and receive our Lord Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist, let's thank our Savior for the great gift of His Church and ask Him for the grace to always build up Her up in any way that we can, but most especially through the proclamation of the Gospel.