

Holy Spirit, come dwell in us
By Bishop Milan Lach, SJ

We are celebrating Pentecost today. As we heard in the first reading (Acts 2:1-11), the room was filled with wind and tongues of fire appeared above each Apostle. They began to speak in different languages and they went out to Jerusalem to proclaim the Gospel.

Jesus promised his Apostles the Holy Spirit. Who is this Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, who gives life to everyone who is open to it. How do we receive the Holy Spirit? Through the holy sacraments in our life.

Just as a small child grows slowly, day by day, step by step, we, too, if we are open to it, will grow in the Holy Spirit that we received, day by day, step by step, so that we can become witnesses to Jesus Christ, witnesses of eternal life.

What is the goal of the Christian life? Is it fasting or attending Sunday and holy day services? The unique goal of the Christian life is to receive the Holy Spirit and to be a member of the Body of Christ. If we have the Holy Spirit, then we have life.

Life is a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Where there is life, there is the Spirit. The Spirit teaches us to pray. It is through the Spirit that God brought about the salvation of the world.

The Angel Gabriel appeared to the Mother of God, who accepted that she should conceive by the Holy Spirit. Her response to this message was, "I am the handmaiden of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word." She was open to the Holy Spirit.

The Church Fathers explain that Pentecost is the conclusion of the story of salvation. It is on this day that the church was founded; it is the birthday of the church, and it is something wonderful and joyful.

And while we celebrate the church, it is important to know that God does not only live in the church building, but he lives in the church of your heart. However, you need to open your heart to God. He does not impose himself. He does not barge in.

Every man and every woman has to open their heart and to say to God, "I welcome you. I welcome you, Jesus Christ. Stay with me inside of my heart."

Dear brothers and sisters, we need churches for celebrations and services, but we are not in church every hour of every day. We need to bring God with us into our homes, and to pray with our families there.

I challenge you to make this commitment in your life: to pray intentionally with your family. It will not be easy. You will have to make sacrifices. You will have to turn off the TV; turn off that wonderful movie, to pray together.

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to his Apostles, but you, too, are his disciples and you are sent by Jesus with the Holy Spirit to go out into the world. Pray to the Spirit to be a witness to Jesus, that he will give you the words you need to witness to your friend, your colleague or your friend at the supermarket.

Sometimes, we put more trust in our insurance policies than in God. This is our problem, but we must fix this problem, because God wants us to grow in faith, love and joy, and be his witnesses.

So often, we judge each other. It is easy to judge: to judge the bishop, the priest, the cantor. We don't need the Holy Spirit to judge.

But, if you have the Holy Spirit, then you will also have his fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23).

It is not enough to have a wonderful celebration for Pentecost and go home. We must decide to ask the Holy Spirit, "Come and dwell in me, dwell in my heart, because I want to be your witness, I want to proclaim that you are Life."

+Bishop Milan

This column of the Voice of the Shepherd is based on the homily Bishop Lach preached at the 60th-anniversary celebration of St. Stephen church, held on Pentecost, June 9.