

6th Sunday of Easter
“While Peter was still speaking...,
the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word.

Jesus Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! The King of Kings and Lord of Lords, risen from the dead, now invites each of us to not only share in the gift of His Holy Spirit, but to also be agents through whom that Holy Spirit touches the lives of others. The situation of Cornelius and his family is a classic example of the perfect ‘set-up’ on God’s part. Cornelius is a Roman centurion, but he feared God and wanted to follow him. An angel appears to him to set him on the right path and communicates to him a word of knowledge concerning what to do. Peter, on the other hand, is a devout Jew, who, as a devout Jew, believed that the gifts of God, especially a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit were for the Jewish people alone. He is given both a dream to correct his theology, and a word of knowledge about what to do next, i.e. go with the men Cornelius has sent. What is the consequence of this? Peter preaches to them the Good News and “while he is still speaking” the Holy Spirit descends on all of these pagans and they receive the charismatic gifts, praying in tongues and glorifying God.

This two-fold set-up also occurs in re Saul. Ananias receives a word of knowledge that he is to go to minister to Saul; the word of knowledge even includes street directions! At the same time, Saul is having a word of knowledge that identifies someone named Ananias who is coming to minister to him. The Holy Spirit moves on both the agent and the recipient in this case as well, to bring about the perfect set-up that results in deeper personal conversion the reception of the Holy Spirit, and, especially in St. Paul’s case, great advancement for the Kingdom of Heaven! These are classic examples of the truth of the Scripture that describes how the Spirit prepares the way for us, as St. Paul comments in Ephesians: ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:10). How we come to know what those works are, so that we can walk in them is demonstrated in these narratives from Acts? Peter was praying when he received the vision. Prayer is the key to our relationship with the Lord Jesus, especially in terms of receiving the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that we can be effectively used to build the Kingdom.

As we approach the great Solemnity of Pentecost, now is a time for each of us to re-read the Acts of the Apostles, opening our hearts to the wisdom of the Word of God and also to plead with the Lord Jesus to stir within our hearts a greater desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit that He may use us to glorify the Lord Jesus and build the Kingdom! The Spirit was given to each of us at our Baptism and marvelously strengthened in our Confirmation. The power of the Holy Spirit, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out, was meant to be for each of us: “This fullness of the Spirit was not to remain uniquely the Messiah’s but was to be communicated to the whole Messianic people.” (CCC #1287). The Sacramental vehicle for that communication of the Spirit is our Confirmation, “which...perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church.” (CCC, #1288). The experience of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit has been strongly recommended for each of us by the last several Popes, e.g. Pope St. John Paul the Great: “obediently open yourself to the gifts the Spirit never fails to give;” Pope Benedict XVI: “I want you all to experience the beauty of being baptized in the Holy Spirit;” Pope Francis, in addressing groups of priests: “Tell your people to take the Life in the Spirit Seminars.” This experience of the Holy Spirit is often the vehicle through which those graces of Pentecost, given to us in Confirmation, are more fully released and actualized. Now is the time to ask for more!