



## Pentecost Sunday May 27, 2012 B

### **The Church, our Spirit-Filled Extended Spiritual Family**

Today we celebrate the birthday of our Church. Catholics believe and teach that the Holy Trinity brought the Church into being. *The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* states:

*The Father called the Church into existence.*

*The Son established the Church.*

*The Holy Spirit filled the Church with power and wisdom at Pentecost.*

*The Holy Trinity abides with the Church always, creatively and providentially.*

*The Church empowered by the Holy Spirit, brings Christ's salvation to the world.*

*She is the instrument of God's call to holiness.*

*At the same time, the Church is made up of sinful people, yet despite the personal sinfulness of her members, the Church remains holy by the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit who permeates her.*

What a mouthful from the U.S. Catechism.

The Church flows from the life of the Trinity. We can say that from all eternity the Church has been the plan of God. From the beginning, God wanted to *share* his divine life with us his children.

God prepared for the founding of the Church by forming the people of Israel. Sometimes the Church is called the New Israel.

Jesus, the Word of God made Flesh, brought to fulfillment the Father's plan for a church. He started this process by preaching the Good News of salvation and the invitation to participate in God's divine life: "*I am the Vine, you are the branches*" (John 15:1-8). Then he called together some of his disciples who in turn would become the pillars of the young Church. We call these men, the Apostles.

*The Holy Spirit revealed the Church at Pentecost, coming upon the Apostles and the disciples with a transforming fire and forming them into a visible community, and empowering them to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

(U.S. Catechism, p.114)

We know from the Acts of the Apostles that there is an inseparable link between the Church and Jesus and the Holy Spirit. When Saul was persecuting the Church, Jesus appeared to him and said: "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*" Saul answered: "*Who are you, sir?*" The voice answered: "*I am Jesus and you are persecuting me.*" (Acts 9:4-5)

When we are tempted to lose faith in our Church because of its flawed members, we must remember that the Church is the Body of Christ in our midst.

#### *A Church of Sinners*

Catholics believe that the Church is both *human* and *divine*. As human, its earthly members are not exempt from sin and will always be in need of purification and interior renewal. In the Catholic Church, this need for ongoing conversion is evident by the presence of confessionals in her churches. We are indeed a "church of sinners." In fact, if we were to place a sign over the church door as a condition of entry, it would read:

Remember what Jesus said: "*I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners*" (Luke 2:17). The Church's membership has *always* been imperfect (recall the betrayal of Judas and the denials of Peter), *is* still imperfect, and will undoubtedly remain imperfect until the end of time.

Learning to live with and work in a church with imperfect members can be a faith challenge for many people. Unfortunately, lots of Catholics cannot accept this reality and for this reason opt out. Some go church-hopping in hopes of finding the *perfect* church, which is just not attainable.

#### *Divine Nature of the Church*

I'm not sure but I think that only the Catholic Church believes in its *divine* nature and origin. Our Church was not created by some earthly human being. Our Church was founded by Jesus who promised to be with her until the end of time. Catholics also believe that the Holy Spirit permeates the Church, guiding her and empowering her to continue the work of Jesus here on earth. So while the Church is *always* in need of reform and renewal, she is never in need of *replacement*—the mistake Martin Luther and other Reformers made in the

16th century. What Jesus founded and promised to remain with until the end of time is *never* in need of replacement.

Reflecting on the nature of the Catholic Church, English Protestant and historian Thomas Macaulay writes: *There is not and there never was on earth a work of human policy so well deserving of examination as the Roman Catholic Church. The history of that Church joins together two great ages of human civilization. No other institution is left standing, which carries the mind back to the times when the smoke of sacrifice rose from the Pantheon, and when camelopards and tigers bounded in the Flavian Amphitheater.*

*The proudest royal houses are but of yesterday, when compared to the line of Supreme Pontiffs. That line we trace back to an unbroken series from the Pope who crowned Napoleon in the nineteenth century to the Pope who crowned Pepin in the eighth; and far beyond the time of Pepin, the august dynasty extended till it is lost in the twilight of fable.*

*The Church saw the commencement of all governments and of all the ecclesiastical establishments that now exist in the world; and we feel no assurance that she is not destined to see the end of them all. She was great and respected before the Saxon set foot on Britain, before the Frank had passed the Rhine, when Grecian eloquence still flourished at Antioch, when idols were still worshiped in the temple of Mecca.*

*And she may still exist in undiminished vigor when some traveler from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's.*

Those reflecting on the utter sinfulness of some Church leaders, including some Popes, and the attacks the Church has endured from within and without, conclude that this Church must be *divine* in origin. Otherwise, she would have disappeared many centuries ago.

Sometimes the mistakes committed by Church members, as in recent clergy sex scandals, can make us feel ashamed to be Catholic. But this should only remind us of our own sinfulness and our own need for penance and renewal. The best way to reform the Church is to transform ourselves. Then we are in a better position to call Church leadership to reform and renewal.

We should often pray for mother Church and do all we can to bring renewal to her. But we don't need to overly worry about the Church because she belongs to God and he will protect her from self-destruction.

## Two Prayers to the Holy Spirit

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,  
that my thoughts may all be holy.  
Act in me, O Holy Spirit,  
that my work, too, may be holy.  
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,  
that I love but what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,  
to defend all that is holy.  
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,  
that I always may be holy.  
Amen.

St. Augustine

## Breath of God

[The Holy Spirit is often referred to as the breath of God.]

Breathe on me, breath of God,  
fill me with life anew,  
that I may love the thing you love,  
and do what you would do.

Breathe on me, breath of God,  
until my heart is pure,  
until with you I have one will,  
to live and to endure.

Breathe on me, breath of God,  
my soul with grace refine,  
until this earthly part of me  
glows with your fire divine.

Breathe on me, breath of God,  
do I shall never die,  
but live with you the perfect life  
in your eternity.

Midmorning Prayer from Liturgy of the Hours

Have a blessed week,

