This article first appeared in the May 2021 Print Edition of *Catholic Family News* (click HERE to subscribe; current subscribers can access the E-Edition HERE).

Pentecost: The Coming of the Holy Ghost

"And when the days of the Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together in one place: And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them: And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak" (Acts 2:1-4).

As we approach the great Feast of Pentecost, we are reminded of that fateful scene nearly 2,000 years ago wherein the mission of the Church founded by Jesus Christ was set ablaze. After the sorrow of the Crucifixion, the elation of the Resurrection, and the glory of the Ascension, the Apostles and other disciples prayed in preparation for the coming of the Holy Ghost, according to Our Lord's words before He ascended: "And I send the promise of My Father upon you: but stay you in the city [i.e., Jerusalem] till you be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). It is said that those days of prayer between the Ascension and the arrival of the Holy Ghost constitute the first Novena.

When I pray the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary, I often wonder what it would have looked like in that moment wherein the Holy Ghost descended as tongues of fire on the Apostles. In my mind's eye, I usually envision a room that has been hit by something like a concussion-blast, but of course not harmful. Maybe that seems like a strange way to look at the event, but there is something about the magnitude that causes me to see it that way.

A Word on "Speaking in Tongues"

Contrary to modern errors about the "tongues" spoken at Pentecost, it was not an occasion for what has been called "glossolalia," which some commentators say refers to what St. Paul speaks of in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: "For he that speaketh in a tongue, speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man heareth. Yet by the Spirit he speaketh mysteries" (1 Cor. 14:2). I understand there is debate about how that sort of thing might manifest (if at all) today, and I do not intend to consider that at length here. I simply mean to distinguish the "tongues" of Pentecost from what might be considered the "tongues of Angels." It is clear in the writings of the Fathers, for example, that the tongues spoken by the Apostles were a variety of human languages that they had never spoken. This allowed them to speak to the divers populations and nations of the world, either by speaking a new language or by

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

way of the listener hearing the words in their own language.

A case in point of this miraculous gift was the preaching of St. Peter to the crowd of people from all over the Empire who had come for the Pentecost festivities in Jerusalem: “Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. And when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded in mind, because that every man heard them speak in his own tongue. And they were all amazed, and wondered, saying: Behold, are not all these, that speak, Galileans? And how have we heard, every man our own tongue wherein we were born? … And they were all astonished, and wondered, saying one to another: What meaneth this?” (Acts 2:5-8, 12).

Perhaps one of the most powerful passages of Peter’s legendary sermon is the following: “Foreseeing this, he [King David] spoke of the resurrection of Christ. For neither was He [Our Lord] left in hell, neither did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised again, whereof all we [the Apostles] are witnesses. Being exalted therefore by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath poured forth this which you see and hear. For David ascended not into heaven; but he himself said: *The Lord said to my Lord, sit Thou on My right hand, until I make Thy enemies Thy footstool.* Therefore, let all the house of Israel know most certainly, that God hath made both Lord and Christ, this same Jesus, Whom you have crucified” (Act 2:31-36).

There is a significant amount more that Peter preached, but the aspect I find most striking is the dichotomy between the Kingship of Christ and the reality of His Crucifixion in atonement “for our sins” and “for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). From here, we all know the story: thousands were baptized, the Apostles spread the Faith throughout the world, and the Church as we know it took root among “every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Apoc. 5:9). The first Pentecost truly was a moment of great hope and expansion of Christ’s saving Gospel to all nations.

The Call for a “New Pentecost”

Fast-forward to 1959 and we find the phrase “a new Pentecost” in a prayer issued by the Apostolic Penitentiary (Sept. 23, 1959), to be prayed for the success of the then-upcoming Second Vatican Council (1962-1965): “Renew Your wonders in this our day, as by a new Pentecost. Grant to Your Church that, being of one mind and steadfast in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and following the lead of Blessed Peter, it may advance the reign of our Divine Savior, the reign of truth and justice, the reign of love and peace. Amen.”[1] This same prayer is quoted by Pope John XXIII, the Pontiff who convened Vatican II, towards the end of his Apostolic Constitution *Humanae Salutis* (Dec. 25, 1961) by which he solemnly convoked the Council.

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

Now, I understand that some take issue with this statement as they believe the Holy Father is suggesting that there will be something like a ‘new Church’ in the way that the first Pentecost was the beginning of the spread of the Church as we understand it. But, giving good Pope John the benefit of the doubt, I think we can look at what he said as a symbolic action of a renewal of the mission of the Church throughout the world. This is a pleasant thing to consider, of course, and a renewed spread of the Holy Ghost through the world would be wonderful. In addition, it is nice to see a modern pope invoking the notion of truth and justice, especially since we live in an age defined by papal appeals to an amorphous form of undefined ‘mercy.’

Taking all positives of this sentiment into account, we know that what has happened since the chaos of the Second Vatican Council is certainly *not* “a new Pentecost.” If there were ever a time when we could say we were going through another version of Pentecost, it would be characterized by the spread of the Faith, true unity in purpose, and the courage to deny the world and live for Christ. Of course, there are still areas in the world where Christians are courageous in their faith, and we should thank God for this; nevertheless, the Church as a whole is clearly suffering from widespread doctrinal and moral corruption.

If we look back now at what has happened since Pope John asked the faithful to pray for a “new Pentecost,” we see an epic disaster that seems more like a chastisement than anything. This became very apparent in the immediate aftermath of the Council, as evidenced by Pope Paul VI’s own admission in 1972: “Through some fissure the smoke of Satan has entered the temple of God.” Nonetheless, the popes since that time have persisted in this notion that a “new Pentecost” did in fact come, and that the Holy Ghost has been leading the Church into an age of restoration through various movements and events.

Charismatic Renewal

This supposed movement of the Holy Ghost is best personified by the so-called ‘Charismatic Renewal.’ Now, before I comment on the Charismatic Renewal, I want to be fair. I owe a debt of gratitude to various Catholics who lean in that direction and were wonderful to me in my coming back to the Church. I have since realized how dangerous that movement is, for various reasons, but there are many Catholics who have been inspired by the fervent devotion of some so-called ‘Charismatic Catholics.’ I do not excuse the errors of the movement, but I understand that in this devastated vineyard of the post-conciliar era, many are grasping at whatever they can to feed their souls.

It is a strange phenomenon that the so-called Renewal has gained such momentum in the Church, considering how Protestant it is in spirit. Furthermore, there are no shortage of comments from post-conciliar popes about the movement as if it was a gift directly from God

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

— something like a conduit of the Holy Ghost. Speaking to leaders of "Renewal in the Spirit" (April 4, 1998), for example, Pope John Paul II offers a striking quotation:

> "The Catholic charismatic movement is one of the many fruits of the Second Vatican Council, which, like a ***new Pentecost***, led to an extraordinary flourishing in the Church's life of groups and movements particularly sensitive to the action of the Spirit. How can we not give thanks for the precious spiritual fruits that the Renewal has produced in the life of the Church and in the lives of so many people? How many lay faithful – men, women, young people, adults and elderly – have been able to experience in their own lives the amazing power of the Spirit and his gifts! How many people have rediscovered faith, the joy of prayer, the power and beauty of the Word of God, translating all this into generous service in the Church's mission! How many lives have been profoundly changed! For all this today, together with you, I wish to praise and thank the Holy Spirit." (Emphasis added)

Again, to be fair to those who have been edified by some interaction with a Charismatic event, and in order to be kind to people of good will who have supported the movement, I will admit that for many Catholics, encountering a group of 'Charismatics' was their first time ever meeting a group of people who took their faith seriously. As with all movements in the Church, there are some people with good intentions and fervent devotion, and when a person prays earnestly, God can work with that person at any stage.

In any case, when we look at the words of Pope John Paul II, you would think that we were living in a golden age. He speaks of the "many fruits of the Second Vatican Council," for example. Perhaps I might be missing something, but what are these fruits? Does he mean apostasy? Is he speaking of a mass exodus from religious life? Even if we take the positive personal testimonies of those involved in the Charismatic Renewal, there is no evidence that there are "many fruits" from the Council itself. In fact, the opposite is true.

I also wonder if any of these prelates who give their blessing to the Renewal have ever spent much time around the movement. There are many issues, not least of which include the danger of asking for the gift of "tongues," which if you ask an exorcist, is like playing with fire (pun intended). There are also diabolical tongues, which manifest when a person is possessed, especially during an exorcism when someone speaks an ancient language. Speaking in tongues in a true sense is of course a gift that various Saints have had, in order to spread the Gospel, but this is not what happens at a Charismatic event. In reality, what you will find are groups of people begging the 'Spirit' for spiritual gifts — which seems to be

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

the opposite of a humble and holy person — only to then exhibit signs of strong emotions, while often mumbling in incomprehensible jargon. I distinctly remember once being at a Charismatic event, and a woman beside me 'laid her hands' on another woman, muttered something in 'tongues' and then the woman who had been prayed over began to writhe on the floor as if being electrocuted for an hour or so. This is just one of many strange things I saw when I attended these events.[2]

Was Pope John Paul II expressing his gratitude to the Holy Ghost for moments like the one I just described? Also, can we really say that this type of thing is from God?

Furthermore, Charismatic circles are full of chaos and disorder like many realms of the Church. Lay people become like spiritual gurus and do things like pray over priests — a complete inversion of priestly authority. You will even find countless stories about romantic confusion abounding from the overly intimate settings that mixed groups of men and women find themselves in while they lay hands on one another in prayer. Non-traditional Catholics seemingly love to hurl accusations of 'division' at 'rad-trads', but if you do your homework, you will find more than a few instances of irreparable damage done to people's personal lives because of the confusion that abounds in the Charismatic Renewal.

At any rate, we cannot say that there has been a "new Pentecost" in the Church if our measuring stick is the Charismatic Renewal. Of course, any supposed renewal of the Pentecost would be symbolic, but we should welcome a true renewal and outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the Church. I think we can all agree that we would like something positive to happen, that is, a true restoration actually willed by God.

What's in a Fruit?

Ten years prior to John Paul II's above-quoted statements, in April of 1988, negotiations were taking place between then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (on behalf of John Paul II and the Holy See) and Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. On June 30 of that year, Archbishop Lefebvre consecrated four priests of his Society of St. Pius X as bishops — "for the good of the Church and for the continuance of Tradition," as he explained in advance[3] — and the rest, as they say, is history.

Now, let's consider the idea of "fruits" from a biblical perspective. We often hear of Christ talking about "fruits" and "vines" and "wine" in the New Testament. Perhaps the most familiar phrase of His in this regard is "by their fruits you shall know them" (Matt. 7:16). This quotation from Our Lord has been used by Catholics of all stripes to justify whatever position they want. For example, if someone encounters a 'mean trad' in an online forum, they invariably say something like, "Look at the fruits of the traditional movement; they are

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

so unkind.” But when someone hears about young people all excited and on fire when they come back from a Charismatic youth conference, the response is often, “Look at all that fruit! What a sign of the Holy Spirit!”

Let’s take a moment to consider the rest of the passage: “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them” (Matt. 7:16-20).

Growing up Italian, I was fortunate to learn about how to make wine, and about fruit-bearing trees, like fig and peach trees. There’s something interesting about the wine-making process: it takes about *50 years of consistent growth* before you can trust a plant to produce good fruit each harvest. If you were to consult a sommelier and ask about the age of grape-plants at vineyards, they will tell you that they will not use plants that are younger than about half a century to make wine that they will sell to customers. The reason is that some years the plants produce a robust and sugary grape, while other years they produce something sour. Only after the plant is seasoned will we know if it is a “good tree.” As you can imagine, “bad trees” are destroyed and not used to reproduce.

For over 50 years, now, we’ve been told by countless churchmen — including popes — that the Second Vatican Council was indeed a “new Pentecost,” and that its prime fruits include the New Mass and the Charismatic Renewal. Thus, having surpassed the amount of time necessary for the maturing process (according to our vineyard analogy), we can assess the fruits of the Conciliar and post-Conciliar era. We need not go over the litany of errors that have arisen, but suffice it to say we can be sure that the fruits from the vineyard of Vatican II are sour, and no good wine can be made.

True Renewal

On the other hand, last year (2020) marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Society of St. Pius X by Archbishop Lefebvre. Although his society of priests is not the only one in the Church today that preserves and promotes Catholic Tradition, virtually all traditional priests in the Church today are spiritual sons of Lefebvre, even if they do not want to admit it.

With each passing year, we see more traditional ordinations, more traditional religious vocations, and more families relocating to traditional parishes — even diocesan seminaries in some cases are teaching their seminarians the Traditional Latin Mass to keep up with demand. Of course, there is more to a full traditional faith than just having access to the

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

Traditional Mass, but anyone who has spent time in traditional circles can tell you that interest is growing at an exponential rate.

As the mainstream Church continues to flounder during the illusory “new Pentecost,” the traditional movement is thriving and gaining momentum. In fact, we might even entertain an apt corollary between the growth of the Church after the first Pentecost and the growth of Tradition in our day: both started small, and both were forged during a time of persecution.

Granted, we are far from a golden age, but it cannot be underestimated what a small yet mighty and remnant of faithful Catholics can do. Perhaps when John XXIII asked for a “new Pentecost” prior to the Council, the Holy Ghost obliged — in His own time and in His own way. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts: nor your ways My ways, saith the Lord” (Isa. 55:8).

Want more great Catholic content? SUBSCRIBE to *Catholic Family News* and help support our work! DONATIONS are also accepted and greatly appreciated. God bless you and thanks for reading!

---

[1] *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS) 51 (1959), p. 832 (http://www.vatican.va/archive/aas/documents/AAS-51-1959-ocr.pdf).

[2] For a thorough treatment of this subject, see John Vennari, *Close-Ups of the Charismatic Movement* (Los Angeles: TIA, 2002). A review of Mr. Vennari’s book is available online here.

[3] Bishop Bernard Tissier de Mallerais, *Marcel Lefebvre: The Biography* (Kansas City: Angelus Press, 2004), p. 552.

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.