

Dear Young People,

Once again this evening we have heard Christ's great promise – "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you". And we have heard his summons – "be my witnesses throughout the world" – (*Acts* 1:8). These were the very last words which Jesus spoke before his Ascension into heaven. How the Apostles felt upon hearing them, we can only imagine. But we do know that their deep love for Jesus, and their trust in his word, prompted them to gather and to wait; to wait not aimlessly, but together, united in prayer, with the women and Mary in the Upper Room (cf. *Acts* 1:14). Tonight, we do the same. Gathered before our much-travelled Cross and the icon of Mary, and under the magnificent constellation of the Southern Cross, we pray. Tonight, I am praying for you and for young people throughout the world. Be inspired by the example of your Patrons! Accept into your hearts and minds the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit! Recognize and believe in the power of the Spirit in your lives!

Yesterday we talked of the unity and harmony of God's creation and our place within it. We recalled how in the great gift of baptism we, who are made in God's image and likeness, have been reborn, we have become God's adopted children, a new creation. And so it is as children of Christ's light – symbolized by the lit candles you now hold – that we bear witness in our world to the radiance no darkness can overcome (cf. *Jn* 1:5).

Tonight we focus our attention on *how* to become witnesses. We need to understand the person of the Holy Spirit and his vivifying presence in our lives. This is not easy to comprehend. Indeed the variety of images found in scripture referring to the Spirit – wind, fire, breath – indicate our struggle to articulate an understanding of him. Yet we do know that it is the Holy Spirit who, though silent and unseen, gives direction and definition to our witness to Jesus Christ.

You are already well aware that our Christian witness is offered to a world which in many ways is fragile. The unity of God's creation is weakened by wounds which run particularly deep when social relations break apart, or when the human spirit is all but crushed through the exploitation and abuse of persons. Indeed, society today is being fragmented by a way of thinking that is inherently short-sighted, because it disregards the full horizon of truth – the truth about God and about us. By its nature, relativism fails to see the whole picture. It ignores the very principles which enable us to live and flourish in unity, order and harmony.

What is our response, as Christian witnesses, to a divided and fragmented world? How can we offer the hope of peace, healing and harmony to those "stations" of conflict, suffering, and tension through which you have chosen to march with this World Youth Day Cross? Unity and reconciliation cannot be achieved through our efforts alone. God has made us for one another (cf. *Gen* 2:24) and only in God and his Church can we find the unity we seek. Yet, in the face of imperfections and disappointments – both individual and institutional – we are sometimes tempted to construct artificially a "perfect" community. That temptation is not new. The history of the Church includes many examples of attempts to bypass or override human weaknesses or failures in order to create a perfect unity, a spiritual utopia.

Such attempts to construct unity in fact undermine it! To separate the Holy Spirit from Christ present in the Church's institutional structure would compromise the unity of the Christian community, which is precisely the Spirit's gift! It would betray the nature of the Church as the living temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. *I Cor* 3:16). It is the Spirit, in fact, who guides the Church in the way of all truth and unifies her in communion and in the works of ministry (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 4). Unfortunately the temptation to "go it alone" persists. Some today portray their

local community as somehow separate from the so-called institutional Church, by speaking of the former as flexible and open to the Spirit and the latter as rigid and devoid of the Spirit.

Unity is of the essence of the Church (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 813); it is a gift we must recognize and cherish. Tonight, let us pray for the resolve to nurture unity: contribute to it! resist any temptation to walk away! For it is precisely the comprehensiveness, the vast vision, of our faith – solid yet open, consistent yet dynamic, true yet constantly growing in insight – that we can offer our world. Dear young people, is it not because of your faith that friends in difficulty or seeking meaning in their lives have turned to you? Be watchful! Listen! Through the dissonance and division of our world, can you hear the concordant voice of humanity? From the forlorn child in a Darfur camp, or a troubled teenager, or an anxious parent in any suburb, or perhaps even now from the depth of your own heart, there emerges the same human cry for recognition, for belonging, for unity. Who satisfies that essential human yearning to be one, to be immersed in communion, to be built up, to be led to truth? The Holy Spirit! This is the Spirit's role: to bring Christ's work to fulfilment. Enriched with the Spirit's gifts, you will have the power to move beyond the piecemeal, the hollow utopia, the fleeting, to offer the consistency and certainty of Christian witness!

Friends, when reciting the Creed we state: "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life". The "Creator Spirit" is the power of God giving life to all creation and the source of new and abundant life in Christ. The Spirit sustains the Church in union with the Lord and in fidelity to the apostolic Tradition. He inspired the Sacred Scriptures and he guides God's People into the fullness of truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13) In all these ways the Spirit is the "giver of life", leading us into the very heart of God. So, the more we allow the Spirit to direct us, the more perfect will be our configuration to Christ and the deeper our immersion in the life of the Triune God.

This sharing in God's nature (cf. *2 Pet* 1:4) occurs in the unfolding of the everyday moments of our lives where he is always present (cf. *Bar* 3:38). There are times, however, when we might be tempted to seek a certain fulfilment apart from God. Jesus himself asked the Twelve: "do you also wish to go away?" Such drifting away perhaps offers the illusion of freedom. But where does it lead? To whom would we go? For in our hearts we know that it is the Lord who has "the words of eternal life" (*Jn* 6:67-68). To turn away from him is only a futile attempt to escape from ourselves (cf. Saint Augustine, *Confessions* VIII, 7). God is with us in the reality of life, not the fantasy! It is embrace, not escape, that we seek! So the Holy Spirit gently but surely steers us back to what is real, what is lasting, what is true. It is the Spirit who leads us back into the communion of the Blessed Trinity!

The Holy Spirit has been in some ways the neglected person of the Blessed Trinity. A clear understanding of the Spirit almost seems beyond our reach. When I was a small boy, my parents, like yours, taught me the Sign of the Cross. So, I soon came to realize that there is one God in three Persons, and that the Trinity is the centre of our Christian faith and life. While I grew up to have some understanding of God the Father and the Son – the names already conveyed much – my understanding of the third person of the Trinity remained incomplete. So, as a young priest teaching theology, I decided to study the outstanding witnesses to the Spirit in the Church's history. It was on this journey that I found myself reading, among others, the great Saint Augustine.

Augustine's understanding of the Holy Spirit evolved gradually; it was a struggle. As a young man he had followed Manichaeism - one of those attempts I mentioned earlier, to create a spiritual utopia by radically separating the things of the spirit from the things of the flesh. Hence he was at first suspicious of the Christian teaching that God had become man. Yet his

experience of the love of God present in the Church led him to investigate its source in the life of the Triune God. This led him to three particular insights about the Holy Spirit as the bond of unity within the Blessed Trinity: unity as communion, unity as abiding love, and unity as giving and gift. These three insights are not just theoretical. They help explain how the Spirit works. In a world where both individuals and communities often suffer from an absence of unity or cohesion, these insights help us remain attuned to the Spirit and to extend and clarify the scope of our witness.

So, with Augustine's help, let us illustrate something of the Holy Spirit's work. He noted that the two words "Holy" and "Spirit" refer to what is divine about God; in other words what is shared by the Father and the Son – their *communion*. So, if the distinguishing characteristic of the Holy Spirit is to be what is *shared* by the Father and the Son, Augustine concluded that the Spirit's particular quality is *unity*. It is a unity of lived communion: a unity of persons in a relationship of constant giving, the Father and the Son giving themselves to each other. We begin to glimpse, I think, how illuminating is this understanding of the Holy Spirit as unity, as communion. True unity could never be founded upon relationships which deny the equal dignity of other persons. Nor is unity simply the sum total of the groups through which we sometimes attempt to "define" ourselves. In fact, only in the life of communion is unity sustained and human identity fulfilled: we recognize the common need for God, we respond to the unifying presence of the Holy Spirit, and we give ourselves to one another in service.

Augustine's second insight – the Holy Spirit as abiding love – comes from his study of the First Letter of Saint John. John tells us that "God is love" (*1 Jn* 4:16). Augustine suggests that while these words refer to the Trinity as a whole they express a particular characteristic of the Holy Spirit. Reflecting on the lasting nature of love - "whoever abides in love remains in God and God in him" (*ibid.*) - he wondered: is it love or the Holy Spirit which grants the abiding? This is the conclusion he reaches: "The Holy Spirit makes us remain in God and God in us; yet it is love that effects this. The Spirit therefore is God as love!" (*De Trinitate*, 15.17.31). It is a beautiful explanation: God shares himself as love in the Holy Spirit. What further understanding might we gain from this insight? Love is the sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit! Ideas or voices which lack love – even if they seem sophisticated or knowledgeable – cannot be "of the Spirit". Furthermore, love has a particular trait: far from being indulgent or fickle, it has a task or purpose to fulfil: to abide. By its nature love is enduring. Again, dear friends, we catch a further glimpse of how much the Holy Spirit offers our world: love which dispels uncertainty; love which overcomes the fear of betrayal; love which carries eternity within; the true love which draws us into a unity that abides!

The third insight – the Holy Spirit as gift – Augustine derived from meditating on a Gospel passage we all know and love: Christ's conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. Here Jesus reveals himself as the giver of the living water (cf. *Jn* 4:10) which later is explained as the Holy Spirit (cf. *Jn* 7:39; *1 Cor* 12:13). The Spirit is "God's gift" (*Jn* 4:10) - the internal spring (cf. *Jn* 4:14), who truly satisfies our deepest thirst and leads us to the Father. From this observation Augustine concludes that God sharing himself with us as gift is the Holy Spirit (cf. *De Trinitate*, 15, 18, 32). Friends, again we catch a glimpse of the Trinity at work: the Holy Spirit is God eternally giving himself; like a never-ending spring he pours forth nothing less than himself. In view of this ceaseless gift, we come to see the limitations of all that perishes, the folly of the consumerist mindset. We begin to understand why the quest for novelty leaves us unsatisfied and wanting. Are we not looking for an eternal gift? The spring that will never run dry? With the Samaritan woman, let us exclaim: give me this water that I may thirst

no more! (cf. *Jn* 4:15).

Dear young people, we have seen that it is the Holy Spirit who brings about the wonderful communion of believers in Jesus Christ. True to his nature as giver and gift alike, he is even now working through you. Inspired by the insights of Saint Augustine: let *unifying love* be your measure; *abiding love* your challenge; *self-giving love* your mission!

Tomorrow, that same gift of the Spirit will be solemnly conferred upon our confirmation candidates. I shall pray: “give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgement and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence ... and fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe”. These gifts of the Spirit – each of which, as Saint Francis de Sales reminds us, is a way to participate in the one love of God – are neither prizes nor rewards. They are freely given (cf. *I Cor* 12:11). And they require only one response on the part of the receiver: I accept! Here we sense something of the deep mystery of being Christian. What constitutes our faith is not primarily what we do but what we receive. After all, many generous people who are not Christian may well achieve far more than we do. Friends, do you accept being drawn into God’s Trinitarian life? Do you accept being drawn into his communion of love?

The Spirit’s gifts working within us give direction and definition to our witness. Directed to unity, the gifts of the Spirit bind us more closely to the whole Body of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 11), equipping us better to build up the Church in order to serve the world (cf. *Eph* 4:13). They call us to active and joyful participation in the life of the Church: in parishes and ecclesial movements, in religious education classes, in university chaplaincies and other catholic organizations. Yes, the Church must grow in unity, must be strengthened in holiness, must be rejuvenated, must be constantly renewed (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 4). But according to whose standard? The Holy Spirit’s! Turn to him, dear young people, and you will find the true meaning of renewal.

Tonight, gathered under the beauty of the night sky, our hearts and minds are filled with gratitude to God for the great gift of our Trinitarian faith. We recall our parents and grandparents who walked alongside us when we, as children, were taking our first steps in our pilgrim journey of faith. Now many years later, you have gathered as young adults with the Successor of Peter. I am filled with deep joy to be with you. Let us invoke the Holy Spirit: he is the artisan of God’s works (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 741). Let his gifts shape you! Just as the Church travels the same journey with all humanity, so too you are called to exercise the Spirit’s gifts amidst the ups and downs of your daily life. Let your faith mature through your studies, work, sport, music and art. Let it be sustained by prayer and nurtured by the sacraments, and thus be a source of inspiration and help to those around you. In the end, life is not about accumulation. It is much more than success. To be truly alive is to be transformed from within, open to the energy of God’s love. In accepting the power of the Holy Spirit you too can transform your families, communities and nations. Set free the gifts! Let wisdom, courage, awe and reverence be the marks of greatness!

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