



March 30, 2011
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(GSN) Unity Requires Fidelity to the
Apostles' Teaching, Fellowship,
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Transformed in the Holy Spirit

By Patrick O'Meara

Last week I returned from a weeklong visit to Rome. I was there for a Colloquium sponsored by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. The Colloquium focused on the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in particular the ecclesial movements and pastoral concerns. It also provided for some discussion and guidelines regarding certain doctrinal issues. I mostly listened.

My time in Rome was extremely productive, spiritually uplifting, and hopeful. I am hopeful in Christ and the Holy Spirit who has been sent to us to transform the world, and I am grateful for the part we are engaged in to help bring about the Spirit's work of renewal and transformation in the lives of the people we serve.

Of course, the attraction of Rome is, at first glance, very natural. Rome is the place where Peter was martyred and where he was laid to rest, his tomb lying perfectly underneath the main altar of St. Peter's Basilica. As the first Vicar of Christ, we come to Rome to connect with Peter who in turn connects us to Jesus Christ. But this natural attractiveness is not simply to the past, it is also an attraction to a living reality. We also come to Rome in hopes to catch a glimpse of the current Vicar of Christ, the Pope. To be in St. Peter's Square for one of his weekly audiences, to attend a papal mass, or to receive from him a papal blessing all connect us to the roots of our Catholic faith. As the successor to Peter, the Pope is that current connection in unbroken succession back to St. Peter and the apostolic Church which Jesus Christ founded.

While St. Peter and his successors are at the center of our attraction to Rome and the historical roots of our faith, Christ promised us more than this. Our deepest connection to Him comes in receiving the Holy Spirit which brings us into that divine communion of the Blessed Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son which is given and received perfectly such that the Holy Spirit emanates as a distinct divine

Person between them. The lay apologist, Frank Sheed, expressed it in this manner:

This act of loving produces a state of Lovingness within the Divine Nature. Into this Lovingness, Father and Son pour all that they have and all that they are, with no diminution, nothing held back. Thus, the Lovingness within the Godhead is utterly equal to the Father and the Son, for they have poured their all into it. . . . Thus their Lovingness too is Infinite, Eternal, Living, Someone, a Person, God.

Therefore receiving the Holy Spirit means literally receiving the love between the Father and the Son. And as our love for God is deepened, so should our love for one another. St. John writes, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20).

The account of St. Peter's preaching at Pentecost provides an excellent example of how his life changed after he had received the Holy Spirit and how that transformation effected not only him personally but also all those who would come into contact with him. After having received the gift of the Holy Spirit at the first Pentecost, Peter did not receive a greater knowledge of the person of Christ but a greater love for Christ and the inspiration, confidence and zeal to share that love with others. His love for Christ overcame all fear and he preached Christ and Him crucified. With full confidence in the Spirit, Peter rose and proclaimed, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, . . . , give ear to my words. . . . This Jesus, whom you crucified, is both Lord and Savior." (Acts 2:14, 36). At the hearing of these words, the very first proclamation of the gospel given to mark the birth of the Church at Pentecost, the Scriptures tell us that the people "were cut to the heart and said to Peter, . . . 'What shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of



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the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:37-38). The story ends by recounting that those who received Peter’s preaching were changed. It was not just the knowledge of Jesus Christ which changed them but the encounter with the Holy Spirit through St. Peter’s inspired preaching which cut them to the heart. Peter’s ministry, laboring under the power of the Holy Spirit, brought about real conversion in those who heard him because they took the opportunity to repent, be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit.

This same invitation is available to us if we seek to follow Jesus. The Holy Spirit gives us the grace and strength to put our lives, that means every aspect of it, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This takes real repentance, ongoing conversion and a commitment on our part to do this in our daily lives.

The work of the Holy Spirit should not only transform our own lives but also the lives of

those around us. Like St. Peter and so many other examples of martyrs and saints down through the ages, we too are called to bear Jesus Christ to the world. My trip to Rome reminded me again that we who work in the Church do so with little effect if we only work under our own power. For our work to be truly transformative and bring about effective renewal we have to labor under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and rely upon the strength and grace of His Holy Spirit to guide our work.

Therefore, let us repent, believe, and receive more of the power of the Holy Spirit so that we may be filled with a deeper love of God and our neighbor. And by that same Spirit, set the world ablaze with the power of His divine love.

Let us turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary, as that living icon of the Spirit for her help and intercession. Mary, seat of Wisdom, pray for us.

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