

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Happy Birthday!

Today is Pentecost Sunday, which is the birthday of the Church. Why is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit called the birthday of the Church? We have to remember *what the Church is* to understand this. The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. This is important: the Church is NOT an organization of likeminded people who gather to worship God in a set format. It's not like the Pope is the CEO of "the business: the Church, d. b. a. St. Patrick Parish," or that he is some sort of grand poohbah. The Church *is* the Body of Christ.

When St. Paul (aka Saul) was still persecuting Christians, he had a profound revelation of Christ – there was a light from the sky, he fell to the ground, and a voice from heaven spoke to him saying, "**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?**" (Acts 9:4). When Saul asked who it was, the voice said, "**I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting**" (Acts 9:5). Jesus did not say, "Why are you persecuting my organization" or "my people" but "**me.**" By persecuting the Church, Saul was actually persecuting Jesus Himself, in His Body the Church. In another place, Jesus speaks about the Last Judgment, and says, "**I was hungry... I was thirsty,... whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me**" (see Matthew 25:31-46). In these two passages, we find that Christ is really, truly present in His people; He identifies Himself *as* His Church.

This all points to the truth that the Church is not just an organization, but really, truly is the Body of Christ. The only way this can be is that the Holy Spirit animates the Church. Without the Holy Spirit, the Church really would just be an organization. There is something Divine (and, of course, human) about the Church. In order for that to be so, God must somehow be animating the Church.

I've shared this quote before, but I still find it apt:

Without the Holy Spirit

**God is far away
Christ stays in the past,
the Gospel is a dead letter,
the church is simply an organization,
authority a matter of domination,
mission a matter of propaganda,
the liturgy no more than an evocation,
Christian living a slave morality.**

But in the Holy Spirit:

**the cosmos is resurrected and groans with the birth-pangs of the kingdom,
the risen Christ is here,
the Gospel is the power of life,
the church shows forth the life of the Trinity,
authority is liberating service,
mission is Pentecost,
the liturgy is both memorial and anticipation,
human action is deified.** (Metropolitan Ignatios of Latakia, "The Main Address," *the Uppsala Report*)

The Holy Spirit raises what we do, how we worship, *who we are* into Divine Life. **Really.** In Baptism, the Holy Spirit changes us into children of God at the very core and soul of our being, and we become a dwelling place of God, a Temple of the Holy Spirit! Do not be afraid of transcendence! God is working miracles in us – often in ways so hidden that we cannot see them – every day! We were made for God alone! The Holy Spirit makes it so that bread and wine become the very Body and Blood of Christ, that with laying on of hands, sins are not just forgiven, but erased, that with the anointing of oil, bodies and souls are healed! All in the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Church is animated with Divine Life, the Church is born. Let's pray to understand this mystery more fully, and be open to all the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Happy Birthday!