

**Homily for the Sports Faith International Mass  
St. Patrick Church, Lake Forest, Illinois**

**Vigil of Pentecost Sunday  
May 27, 2023**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good for us to be here to celebrate this Mass on the Vigil of Pentecost Sunday, in which we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. I am here along with those involved in a group known as Sports Faith International, which is dedicated to contributing to positive cultural change by showcasing the virtues and achievements of exemplary athletes, coaches and teams. Our 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Sports Faith Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony will honor the achievements of faith-filled members of the sporting community. It is most fitting that we begin this celebration with this most perfect form of thanksgiving, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, giving thanks to our Lord for the many blessings that He bestows upon us.

The date for this Holy Mass for the Sports Faith Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony is intentionally chosen to be on the Vigil of Pentecost, marking the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. It is the Holy

Spirit who confers on the followers of Jesus the gifts they need to live a holy life of grace. The saints, people who knew what it meant to share the love of Christ with those around them, give us an example of how we must live so as to one day be saints as well.

For the past several weeks since Easter, I have been administering the Sacrament of Confirmation to young people in my diocese. It is in this Sacrament that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are received in their fullness as the *confirmandi* are fully initiated into the Church.

Whenever I celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation, I meet before Mass with the Confirmation candidates to explain some of the many symbols that we use in the Church, such as the Sacred Chrism with which they will be anointed and by which they will be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. I ask them if they have ever seen a spirit. Of course, they say no, you cannot see a spirit. I then point out that there are many things that you cannot see that are quite real, like the air we breathe. If there were no air in the room, we would be choking or suffocating from asphyxiation (lack of oxygen). I also ask them if they have ever seen wi-fi. No, comes the answer again. So how do you know if there is wi-fi in the room? Well, if you have internet access on your computer, you must have a wi-fi

connection. But there might also be bars on your phone or computer that indicate whether wi-fi is present and how strong the connection is. I tell them that those bars are symbols, telling us that something is present that we cannot see.

Since we cannot see the Holy Spirit, God also uses symbols to tell us when His Holy Spirit is present, but that symbol is not always the same. When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, the Gospel tells us that the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus like a dove (Matthew 3:16). In the description of Pentecost in the *Acts of the Apostles*, we are told that the Holy Spirit appeared to the disciples as tongues of fire, which came to rest on each one of them (Acts 2:3). Jesus is known as the Christ, which comes from the Greek word that means the one anointed by God's Holy Spirit, and is recognized as the Messiah, the Hebrew word for the Anointed One. Thus, in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation and the Ordination of Priests and Bishops, the presence of the Holy Spirit is symbolized with Sacred Chrism, the holy oil that is consecrated by the Bishop in the Cathedral at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week. It is also by the Apostles' imposition of hands that the Holy Spirit is given (Acts 8:17-19; 13:3; and 19:6).

Most of the time the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives is invisible and not readily apparent to us. Sometimes it is only in retrospect that we can discern the movement of the Holy Spirit. I am sure as you look back at your lives, you can identify blessed moments that cannot be explained as merely coincidental or natural in their origin. We should not dismiss the possibility that such beneficial moments and happy occurrences may in fact be guided by the Holy Spirit.

During this past week between the Solemnity of the Ascension and Pentecost Sunday, our daily readings from the Office of Readings in the Liturgy of the Hours have addressed different aspects of the Holy Spirit.

On Monday, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem compared the working of the Holy Spirit to the various effects that water has on different plants. He says:

Water comes down from heaven as rain, and although it is always the same in itself, it produces many different effects, one in the palm tree, another in the vine, and so on throughout the whole of creation. It does not come down, now as one thing, now as another, but while remaining essentially the same, it adapts itself to the needs of every creature that receives it. In the same way the Holy Spirit, whose nature is

always the same, simple and indivisible, apportions grace to each man as he wills. Like a dry tree which puts forth shoots when watered, the soul bears the fruit of holiness when repentance has made it worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit. Although the Spirit never changes, the effects of this action, by the will of God and in the name of Christ, are both many and marvelous. The Spirit makes one man a teacher of divine truth, inspires another to prophesy, gives another the power of casting out devils, enables another to interpret holy Scripture. The Spirit strengthens one man's self-control, shows another how to help the poor, teaches another to fast and lead a life of asceticism, makes another oblivious to the needs of the body, trains another for martyrdom. His action is different in different people, but the Spirit himself is always the same. *In each person, Scripture says, the Spirit reveals his presence in a particular way for the common good.*<sup>1</sup>

Yesterday, the reading from Saint Cyril of Alexandria described how the Holy Spirit changes us:

It can easily be shown from examples both in the Old Testament and the New that the Spirit changes those in whom he comes to dwell; he so transforms them that they begin to live a completely new kind of life. Saul was told by the prophet Samuel: The Spirit of the Lord will take possession of you, and

you shall be changed into another man. Saint Paul writes: As we behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, that glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit, transforms us all into his own likeness, from one degree of glory to another. Does this not show that the Spirit changes those in whom he comes to dwell and alters the whole pattern of their lives? With the Spirit within them it is quite natural for people who had been absorbed by the things of this world to become entirely other-worldly in outlook, and for cowards to become men of great courage. There can be no doubt that this is what happened to the disciples. The strength they received from the Spirit enabled them to hold firmly to the love of Christ, facing the violence of their persecutors unafraid. Very true, then, was our Savior's saying that it was to their advantage for him to return to heaven: his return was the time appointed for the descent of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

As we celebrate this Solemnity of Pentecost, we thank God for the various ways that the grace of the Holy Spirit has affected us and changed us to be better persons and faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, who comes to us now in this Eucharist.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Cat. 16, *De Spiritu Sancto* 1, 11-12.16: PG 33, 931-935. 939-942.

<sup>2</sup> Lib. 10: PG 74, 434.