

Paul VI
Pentecost address
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PENTECOST ADDRESS

by HIS HOLINESS, POPE PAUL VI

ON ESTABLISHING A SECRETARIAT FOR NON-CHRISTIANS

May 17, 1964

Venerable brothers and beloved sons;

We have invited you to this most holy rite to celebrate together the feast of Pentecost which is the source of every other Christian feast, to re-evaluate together the coming in fullness of the Holy Ghost and to render to this divine Person a most high and lively act of worship (love for Love), to enjoy in unanimous song and unanimous silence together with the absorbing presence of the divine invisible Guest a moment of genuine spiritual rapture.

We have invited you to seize with a glance, as if in a flash of lightning, the visible, historical, human effect of the coming of the Paraclete into the world. We, the Church, this is to say, humanity raised to the true and operating flow of redemption, the living, wandering Church which from that day to this and in the future has been set on the road of its eschatological destinies. We have invited you to know and to feel that we are caught in the current of grace—light, strength, sweetness, prophecy and hope, flowing from Christ and leading back to Christ, the supernatural charism and virile virtue so as to actuate in us an incredible phenomena of sanctity and to find in ourselves the simplicity and audacity to become ourselves the witnesses of Christ in the formidable reality of our century—to meditate, pray and enjoy together a day, among the many in our weary and prosaic life, that is full and blessed.

Yes, it is to you especially, most beloved among beloved persons, you the sons and faithful that you are, the students and guests in our seminaries and ecclesiastical colleges, students of our insti-

tutes of higher studies, of education and ecclesiastic instruction, of religious novitiates and of training centers, you ecclesiastic scholars and students of this Catholic Rome of ours, which is, therefore, eternal and prophetic, it is to you that our invitation is addressed that we may celebrate, all of us together, as "one heart and one soul"¹, the holy feast of Pentecost.

And while we are glad to see present here in this basilica, the cenacle of peoples, many other brothers and sons, pilgrims and travelers from all parts of the world and while we wholeheartedly receive, greet and bless them, it is to you especially, candidates of the priesthood of Christ and those of you on whom this dignity and authority have already been bestowed through sacramental ordination, that my words are addressed, simple and brief, but alas reticent on the central point of the mystery which we are commemorating (which would demand too great study and poetry); words unequal to expressing worthily anything of that light which streams out from that central point, yet fully pervaded, dearest sons, with the affectionate anxiety to impress themselves on your souls as a living and working reminder.

We want to speak to you for a moment of the Church; yes, of that Mystical Body which had its period of time in the womb of evangelical history and was born—alive with the Holy Ghost, just as it is today—in the Upper Room at Jerusalem, precisely there where we ourselves a few months ago knelt, trembling with emotion, bending as it were over the cradle of the Church of God. You all know of her we believe and therefore, leaving all this to your pious meditation, we propose to you that now you turn your glance to that native property of the Church, which has blazed forth ever since the first days as a wonderful, characteristic mark which we call catholicity, that is to say, universality, which means the destination of all peoples, the welcoming of all souls, offered to all languages, extended to all civilizations, present in all parts of the earth and addressed to the whole of history.

We are led to this consideration, as always on this blessed day, by the memory of the first wonder which was worked by virtue of the event of Pentecost itself, even more than through the intent and authority of those in whom the event took place; that is to say, the wonderful gift of tongues.

¹ *Acts* 4, 32.

The account of the Acts of the Apostles becomes precise with a prolix enumeration of peoples which seems to us intentionally ecumenical: "Now there were staying at Jerusalem devout Jews from every nation under heaven. And when this sound was heard, the multitude gathered and were bewildered in mind because each heard them speaking in his own language. But they were all amazed and marvelled, saying: Behold, are not all these that are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we have heard each his own language in which he was born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, Jews also and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs . . ." ²; that is to say, representatives of the then known world.

And how magnificently alike to this list of peoples would be the list of nationalities to which you listeners belong today. The name catholic continues its affirmation, its celebration.

The ordinary use of words often detracts from the vigor and wonder of their significance. We use this term "catholicity" with extreme ease, practically without realizing the fullness to which it refers, the dynamism which emanates from it, the beauty which it implies and the effort which it imposes. In ordinary language it often becomes a term which defines, and therefore, which tries to circumscribe and limit the one and true Church, which is precisely the Catholic Church, to distinguish it from other fractions, respectable and still gifted with immense Christian treasures but still separated from Catholic fullness.

And sometimes we prefer to the term of Catholic that of Christian, almost forgetting that, in concept and in reality, the first is intended to encompass all of the second and not always vice versa.

This name of Catholic must be dear and clear to us. It expresses the transcendence of that kingdom of God which Christ came to inaugurate on earth and which the Church is establishing in the world and which, while penetrating like a fermenting principle, like a supernatural energy every soul and every culture which receives it, it does not take for itself anything of the earthly kingdom

² *Acts 2, 5-11.*

and it rises about the temporal plane, not in order to dominate it but to enlighten it and to bring it into a panorama of renascent and universal harmony.

In it we must listen to the undying echo of that mysterious and loving vocation of God which calls everyone, all men, to the meeting with His mercy, and with this call forms the new people, His people, the assembled people, the *congregatio fidelium*, the Church. To take from the Church its qualification of catholic is to alter its countenance, willed by and loved by the Lord; it means offending the ineffable intention of God who wanted to make of the Church the expressing of His unlimited love of mankind.

And it is necessary to understand the psychological and moral innovation which is implied in such a name: yes, deep in the hearts of men the name of Catholic finds there a natural capacity for expansion, a profound but vague instinct for universal expansion: "I am a man and nothing human is alien to me."

But it finds there above all a terrible penury, a narrowness which prevents it from entering. The heart of man is small, it is selfish, it has no room but for himself and a few people, those of his own family and of his own caste. And when, after noble, long and tiresome efforts, it widens a little, when it achieves understanding of its own fatherland and its own social class, yet always does it look for barriers and boundaries within which to measure itself and seek refuge. Even today the heart of modern man finds it difficult to surmount these inner frontiers and when social progress urges him to widen his capacity for love toward the world, he replies uncertainly and makes the selfish condition that it should result to his benefit.

Utility, prestige, if not the unbridled desire to dominate and enslave others to oneself, govern the heart of man. But if the name of Catholic is truly there forever, every selfishness is overcome, every class difference is raised to full social solidarity, every form of nationalism is merged in the good of the world community, every form of racialism is condemned, every form of totalitarianism stands revealed in its inhumanity. The small heart breaks apart, or rather, it acquires an unknown capacity for expansion.

In the words of St. Augustine: "*Dilatentur spatia caritatis*," the Catholic heart means a heart of universal dimensions. A heart

which has overcome selfishness, the radical narrowness which excludes man from the vocation of supreme love. It means a magnanimous heart, an ecumenical heart, a heart capable of receiving the whole world within itself. This does not mean that it will be a heart indifferent to the truth of things and to the sincerity of words. It will not mistake weakness for goodness; it will not place peace above cowardice and apathy. But it will beat in the admirable synthesis of St. Paul: "Rather are we to practice the truth in love".³

Beloved sons, do you understand what it means to be Catholic? Do you understand to what instruction, to what efforts of love this name subjects you? Do you understand that no one better than you can meet the aspirations to universalism of the modern world and that no one better than you can offer to it the example and secret of love for man because he is a man? Because he is the son of God?

Do you understand, as well, another aspect of education to the name of Catholic, which is well known to you too, but which deserves to be proclaimed today? The note of catholicity is already operative in the intrinsic structure of the Church; it is one of its inborn rights. The Church is born catholic, it is born Queen of the salvation of all. But in extrinsic reality, this quality is far from equalling in extension its possible boundaries. It is always *in fieri*, always in stages of its concrete and historic development. Indeed, in concrete reality, the catholicity of the Church is still enormously lacking.

Innumerable peoples, whole continents, are still outside the Christian evangelization. Catholicity is insufficient and suffering. The greater part of mankind has not yet received the message of Pentecost. The world is not yet Catholic.

How many of you, not to say all of you, experience the strange sorrow that such a condition of our world inflicts on a truly Catholic heart! And is it not true that one of the most decisive impulses which directed your decision to become apostles of Christ and priests of His Church, came from the discovery of the need of the world to be evangelized in the name of Christ?

³ *Ephesians* 4, 15.

The missionary dynamism stems from the potential yet still not effective catholicity of the Church. It stems from the investiture of Pentecost given to the little Church to become universal. From the apostolicity of the Church springs its vocation to catholicity. The missionary receives on his shoulders the mandate as apostle which urges him forward along the roads which will make the world Catholic.

Do you, beloved sons, feel this impulse? Do you see before you the interminable ways which will lead you to every part of the world to carry there the message which Catholic Rome hands on to you?

What a wonderful spectacle, what a tremendous adventure, what a perennial Pentecost? We shall say to you that the urgency of responding to this duty of catholicity blows impetuously in the sails of the Church. Look at the apostolate of the clergy and of the laity today. Look at the missions. Look at the ecumenical council. Look at the concern which leads the Church to come to loyal and political expressions which accept it on a plane of absolute sincerity and true humanity. Look at the efforts the Church is making to draw closer once more to the Christian brothers who are still separated from us. Look at the effort the Church is making to bring closer together, even by means of simple human contacts, those belonging to other religions.

Regarding this, we shall announce to you, so that it may have the tone and significance of Pentecost, a statement. It is this: as we announced some time ago, we shall institute here in Rome, and precisely in these days, the "Secretariat for non-Christians," an organ which will have very different functions but the same structure as that for separated Christians. We shall entrust it to the Cardinal Archbishop of this basilica (Paolo Cardinal Marella), who adds to the wisdom and virtue which makes him dear and venerated to the Roman Church, a rare competence in the field of religious ethnography.

No pilgrim, however far geographically or religiously may be the country from which he comes, will any longer feel wholly a foreigner in this Rome which is still today faithful to the historic role which the Catholic Faith assigns to it of *patria communis*.

Therefore, most beloved sons, it will be easy and solemn for us to draw two conclusions from this sacred celebration of ours: two obvious discoveries, which we shall translate into purposes worthy of memory and faithfulness.

They are these: first, there can be no true catholicity if not linked to the unity of the Church, to the unicity of the Church. Second, likewise there cannot be an operating and edifying catholicity that does not spring from the interior existence of a spiritual life nourished by silence, by prayer, by love, by grace. Think and you will see that this is so.

Oh, let then the Holy Ghost come and instruct us on these truths, to infuse in us these virtues, to give us the joy of its vivifying presence. To this does the Mass aspire which we now celebrate and may our apostolic blessing obtain it for you in the end.

