

A SERMON OF ST LEO FOR PENTECOST¹*Translated by F.R.*

EVERY Catholic knows, dearly beloved, that today's feast is among the greatest of the year; none doubts how much reverence is due to that day which the Holy Spirit sealed with the miracle of his gift. Today is the tenth day since the Lord ascended above all heavens to sit at the right hand of God the Father, and the fiftieth since his resurrection; and in it is contained a great mystery comprising God's saving acts both old and new. For as on the fiftieth day after the sacrifice of the passover lamb the law was given on Sinai to the Hebrews who had escaped from Egypt, so after the passion of Christ, in which the true Lamb of God was sacrificed, and fifty days from his resurrection, the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles and the gathering of the faithful. From this the perceptive Christian learns that the beginnings of the old testament provided also the roots of the new; for the same Spirit who established the second covenant, likewise established the first.

The Acts of the Apostles tell us that 'when the days of the Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together in one place: and suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak' (Acts ii, 1-4). Swift are the words of wisdom, and where God is master, how quickly is his teaching learned! No explanation was given to assist their hearing, no lengthy studying or gradual mastering of his message; but by the Holy Spirit 'breathing where he will' the tongues of every nation were made the common possession of the Church's mouth. From this day onwards the trumpet of the gospel preaching sounded; from this day the dew of graces and the flood of blessings watered every dry and desert place; for 'the Spirit of God moved over the waters' to renew the face of the earth; and the brilliance of new light shone out, dispelling

¹ Sermon LXXV. Migne P.L. 54: 400.

ancient darkness. And with the sudden splendour of those tongues was born the shining word of God and fiery utterance, which could both enlighten with understanding and burn and cleanse from sin.

But however wonderful, dearly beloved, was the appearance of these events, and though it cannot be doubted that in that exultant chorus of all human tongues the majesty of the Holy Spirit was present, none must think that his divine substance itself was seen by bodily eyes. For with the Father and the Son he shares an invisible nature, and while indeed he showed forth by such signs as pleased him the character of his gift and work, his proper substance he kept concealed within his godhead; for not only the Father and the Son but also the Holy Spirit is hidden from men's eyes. For in the divine Trinity there is no unlikeness, no inequality; and all that can be thought of as belonging to that substance differs neither in eternity, nor in glory, nor in power. For though by personal properties the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost are all distinct from one another, still there is no distinction of godhead, no diversity of nature. For since the Son is the only-begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, he who proceeds from Father and Son is not like any creature whatsoever, but together with them both he is living and mighty, and eternally subsists as do the Father and the Son.

So when the Lord, before his passion, promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to his disciples, he said: 'I have yet many things to say to you: but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will teach you all truth. For he shall not speak of himself; but what things soever he shall hear, he shall speak; and the things that are to come, he shall show you. All things whatsoever the Father hath, are mine. Therefore I said, that he shall receive of mine, and show it to you' (John xvi, 12-15). Hence it is not the case that some things belong to the Father, some to the Son, and some to the Holy Spirit; but all that the Father has, the Son and the Holy Spirit also have. Never was this perfect communion lacking to the divine Trinity, for in it to possess all things is the same as always to exist. In it no time, no grades, no differences must be imagined; and though no one, when speaking of God, can fully explain what he is, let no one dare to assert that he is what he is not. For of the unutterable

essence, there is more excuse for saying what does not do it full justice, than for defining what in fact is false. Whatever, then, the loving heart can know of the unchanging and eternal glory of the Father, is understood also of the Son and the Holy Ghost, without separation or shade of difference. And so we acknowledge the one God to be this Blessed Trinity; for among the three Persons there is no diversity, either of substance, power, will or operation.

Therefore as we abhor the Arians, who separate the Son from the Father, so too we spurn the Macedonians, who though they attribute equality to Father and Son, reckon the Holy Spirit to be of a lower nature. They do not consider that they have fallen into that blasphemy which has no forgiveness, either in this life or in the life to come, as our Lord says: 'whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but he that shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in the world to come' (Matt. xii, 32). There is no pardon to one who remains in this sin, for he cuts himself off from him by whom he could have made confession; and he who has not the Advocate to plead for him, will never reach the remedy of forgiveness. For by the Holy Spirit we call upon the Father; from him, too, are the tears of penitents and the sighs of suppliants; 'and no man can say the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost' (I Cor. xii, 3). That he is equal in omnipotence with the Father and the Son, and one in godhead with them, the Apostle clearly preaches when he says: 'Now there are diversities of graces, but the same Spirit; and there are diversities of ministries, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but the same God, who worketh all in all' (I Cor. xii, 4-6).

By these and other passages of scripture, most dearly beloved, in which the authority of God's word shines out, we are stirred to venerate the feast of Pentecost, and to rejoice in honour of the Holy Spirit. By him, the whole Catholic Church is made holy, and with him every human soul is filled. For he is the inspirer of faith, the teacher of knowledge, the spring of love, the seal of chastity, the cause of every virtue. The minds of the faithful are filled with joy, that throughout the world the one God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, is worshipped and acknowledged in every language, and that what was revealed by the fiery signs continues still in gift and deed. For the Spirit of truth himself makes his glorious dwelling to shine with the splendour of his light; no

darkness or tepidity will he allow within his temple. And by his aid and teaching, the purification of fast and almsgiving is offered to us. For this healing practice follows by custom on today's festivity; and holy men have always learned its value for themselves. And so, in our pastoral concern, we urge it upon you, that if there is any stain of sin incurred during these days, through careless neglect, the penalty of fasting may correct it, and loving devotion heal it. On Wednesday and Friday, then, let us fast, and on Saturday keep vigil with our accustomed fervour; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
