

# **Mass of the Holy Spirit**

**Sunday 26 - B**

St. Mark's

1 October 2018

Dear Father Rob, Father Nick, Deacons Dileep and Hilmar, colleagues, students, parishioners – all members of the Catholic community on the UBC campus:

## ***Introduction***

Although we are a little past the beginning of yet another academic year at the Colleges, and one I note with great satisfaction having the highest enrollment in its history, nonetheless we are now gathered to celebrate this Mass of the Holy Spirit. As you know, this celebration is an age-old tradition, going back to the founding of the first universities in Europe over 800 years ago. It is good that we are linked to this tradition of higher learning, for it reminds us that the presence of the Holy Spirit is integral to the life of the Colleges and to the pursuit of truth by its teachers and students.

Indeed, the search for truth grounds the Catholic intellectual tradition that is fostered here. This passionate pursuit brings with it what can be called the “discipline of obedience to the truth.” That means we are “collaborators of the truth,” even called to be “mouthpieces of the truth.” As Benedict XVI once said in a homily, “it is not we who speak in today’s river of words, but it is the truth which speaks in us, who are

really purified and made chaste by obedience to the truth.”<sup>1</sup>

And so we come together once again this rainy evening to implore the Holy Spirit, the promised Spirit of Truth (cf. Jn 15:26), to inspire us in our teaching and learning, to accompany us in our endeavours and to bring all that we do to their ultimate fulfilment in the Kingdom where God will be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

### *Search for God*

One of the most pernicious ideas that captivates many of our contemporaries is that we are “some casual and meaningless product of evolution.” Quite the contrary, however. The good Lord has not placed us in a world of fearful darkness where, groping our way in desperation, we fail to find any ultimate meaning. Rather, “each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.”<sup>2</sup> Getting this straight is a prerequisite for pursuing the Truth.

---

<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily (6 October 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily (24 April 2005).

In seeking God, the highest search of them all, he himself has provided us with signposts. Indeed, he has marked out a path for us to find and to follow.<sup>3</sup> Our Triune God has shone forth in our darkness with his light, the “light of the world” (Jn 8:12), Jesus Christ and the Spirit whom he sent to continue his mission.<sup>4</sup> And what better place to be accompanied on this journey into the light of Christ than here on this college campus?

### ***Creator God and Our Participation in Creation***

The ancient world of the Greeks and Romans did not have a creator God. According to them, the highest divinity could not, as it were, dirty his hands in the business of creating matter. The “making” of the world, they claimed, was the work of the Demiurge, a lower deity. But the one and only God, who is the Creator, in Jesus Christ enters personally into the laborious unfolding of history. Because creation is not yet finished, the study of it in all its dimensions – scientific, cultural and spiritual – the task of institutions of higher learning is a privileged way in which we share in God’s own creative activity. This is an awesome responsibility, one ever greater than the desire “to make the world a better place.”

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address to World of Culture, Paris (12 September 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address at Heiligenkreuz Abbey (9 September 2007).

Since the shaping of history can be understood as sharing in the work of the Creator, it must be evaluated in these terms; that is, under the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, by whose power and working the history of humankind unfold. Where the light of faith is lacking, where people arrogate to themselves the status of god-like creators, their shaping of the world can quickly turn to its destruction.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Faith and Reason***

To understand the world, the meaning of human life and its destiny we need not only the use of reason but also, and even more, the light of faith. I know that this view is counter-cultural and not readily accepted in many university circles. That you will discover soon enough, if you have not already encountered it.

Ever since the Enlightenment it is commonplace to hold that educated women and men have only two choices: to accept religious faith or to swear allegiance to reason. The view that one must choose between *either* living a life of a faithful and devout believer *or* leading the life of an intelligent and enlightened adult is widespread today. The assumption of this view is that faith involves feeling and reason is logic, with no connection between them.

But at the Colleges something better is on offer to you. Here we

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address to World of Culture, Paris (12 September 2008).

can speak about the harmony between faith *and* reason. Neither is to be sacrificed, one to the other. To do so is to fall into religious fundamentalism on the one hand or atheistic rationalism on the other hand.

One and the same God who created us with reason also gifted us with faith. You don't have to choose between the two. Everyone can have both. Faith and reason are meant to work together in helping us answer all the big questions that need to be asked.

### ***Missionary Disciples of Faith and Reason***

Lest the harmony of faith and reason remain merely your personal intellectual conviction and approach to reality, let me remind you that the Holy Spirit has also given you the gift of courage to “go forth,” as Pope Francis likes to say. And that “going forth” takes you no further than the classroom or conversations with friends. We're all called to be missionaries on our home turf.

Those with faith are compelled by their faith, fortified by reason, to make their convictions known to others. A phrase from the First Letter of St. Peter sums up your task in this regard: “Always have your answer ready,” he writes, “for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have” (1 Pet 3:15). Don't be either pushy or timid in putting your convictions into the public forum.

### ***See the Spirit at Work***

Before concluding, I cannot ignore today's Gospel and what it can tell us about the work of the Spirit of truth in our midst. In fact, it is not too far a stretch to see in the opening of the Gospel a confirmation of a fundamental insight of St. Thomas which is vitally important to our intellectual tradition. He wrote that "whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit."<sup>6</sup>

This Sunday's Gospel presents the disciples asking for Jesus' opinion, and perhaps intervention, regarding a man, who wasn't part of the group of followers, casting out devils in Jesus' name. They wanted to forbid him. Quite surprisingly, however, Jesus answers that they are not to try to stop him and he gives them the reason: "Whoever is not against us is for us" (Mk 9:40).

What's going on here, and what does it have to do with us? "The disciples reflect an attitude of closure in face of an event that doesn't fit in their schemes, in this case the action, though good, of a person "outside" the circle of followers. Instead, Jesus seems very free, fully open to the freedom of the Spirit of God, who isn't limited in his action by some border or enclosure. Jesus wishes to educate his disciples, also us today, to this interior freedom."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 109, art. 1, ad 1.

<sup>7</sup> Francis, *Angelus* (1 October 2018).

St. Augustine wrote in this regard: “just as, therefore, there is in the Catholic Church something which is not Catholic, so there may be something which is Catholic outside the Catholic Church.”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. St. Augustine, *On Baptism, Against the Donatists*: PL 43, VII, 39, 77.

This is a lesson in dialogue: while holding steadfast to “the discipline of obedience to the truth,” we should always respect, appreciate and value the truth perceived and the good things achieved by those who are not followers of Christ. It is a call to praise God for the infinite “creativity” with which the Holy Spirit acts in the Church and in the world.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

This Mass is a reminder that the Holy Spirit is a real source of power in the intellectual and personal life of students and faculty. Oftentimes called “the Comforter” or “the Paraclete,” which means Advocate, the Holy Spirit is our guide in our mission to “set the world aflame,” as St. Ignatius put it. All inspiration, wisdom, passion, acts of service, and ultimately love, flow from the Holy Spirit.

Let me conclude by praying: “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful [students and teachers], and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and they will be created; and you will renew the face of the earth.”

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (27 September 2012).