

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH

FIRST PASTORAL LETTER

**OF MONSEÑOR
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Bishop of Santiago de María

OUTLINE

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THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH

To our beloved Priests, Religious, and Faithful in the Diocese, JOY AND PEACE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Pentecost, the ideal opportunity

This is the first Pentecost I am celebrating with you, after experiencing for more than five years the affection, the labors, and the concerns of this wonderful portion of the Church. And this is the first pastoral letter that I address to you. I think I could hardly find a more propitious moment than Pentecost for offering you these first-fruits of my role as a teaching bishop, nor could I find theme more appropriate than that of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Indeed, the feast of Pentecost, through the Church's liturgy, "makes present" and real for us the great event of the sending of the Holy Spirit upon the Church so that we might be filled with his saving grace (cf. SC 102). The Spirit was sent to strengthen the Church from on high and make it a witness of the Lord throughout the whole world (cf. Acts 1,8). This dynamic presence of the Spirit in the Church and in our Diocese speaks by itself as loudly as anything my poor words might be able to tell you about the solid reasons for living lives of hope that the Diocese might offer you.

A grateful greeting

Above all, I feel that the joy of this Easter season, which culminates in this exuberant communication of God's life to humankind, provides a cordial and hope-filled space for expressing my greetings, my gratitude, and my good will toward the Diocese and toward the many good friends who, by their warm welcome and countless demonstrations of sympathy and fidelity, have opened up for me broad avenues which allow me to act as your pastor.

How can I help but feel grateful and sing the Virgin's "Magnificat" as I behold this marvelous convergence of good will which, no doubt by the working of the Holy Spirit, bonds ever more closely with the pastor and the principal elements of the Diocese?

For the truth is that, since that unforgettable welcome of December 14th, when I arrived in the city to take possession of the Diocese, my already numerous trips through the towns and the cantons have been a prolonged Palm Sunday, especially in those parishes whose wonderful pastors have known best how to motivate their flocks through teaching and example, through education, and through the fidelity which God's people owes to its pastors.

It would be quite impossible for me to list all the persons to whom this grateful greeting is addressed, but may the Spirit of the Lord, who appreciates and cherishes the merits of each and every one, reward with the "Gift" of himself all those who have so faithfully welcomed Jesus the Good Shepherd in the humble person of their Bishop.

The Holy Spirit in the Church

I would like now to enter into the doctrinal theme of my message, the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. Since my desire is that the Spirit of God bestow his divine gifts and fruits abundantly on the life of the Diocese and all my friends, these are not just routine words of courtesy but an expression of my apostolic longing that we all experience the fecundity and dynamism of the presence of that Spirit which Jesus offered to his Church and to every Christian as a guarantee of truth, as a source of satisfaction, and as a bond of ecclesial communion.

For what other reason does the Church exist in the world if not to prolong among men and women the saving action of Christ, who is Prophet, Priest, and King?

The structure of the Church

The Second Vatican Council states clearly: "Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth his Holy Church ... as an entity with visible delineation through which He communicated truth and grace to all" (L.G. 8) That is what the Church is: a visible institution of men and women hierarchically established, through which Christ communicates his truth and his grace:

Hierarchical communion,
Communion of truth,
Communion of grace.

That is its structure. All change or modernization in the Church needs to take place within the framework of these three coordinates laid down by Jesus Christ himself. Every renewal will be authentic when it favors greater bonding of the hierarchy with the community, when it achieves better communication of the true faith, and when it makes better use of the sacraments and other channels of grace. Adopting any doctrinal or pastoral approaches that neutralize, obstruct, or render ambiguous one or another of these three coordinates will mean working in vain or sowing confusion, no matter how brilliant or up-to-date such approaches may appear.

In saying this, I do not mean to negate the temporal or social adaptations which help faith and grace to shine forth in our world; to the contrary, I declare without fear that the Church, precisely by virtue of its hierarchical bonding and its fidelity to its mission of communicating faith and grace, will be a stronger, more credible, and more heeded witness in the midst of temporal realities.

The way our Diocese should be

That's the way we want our Diocese: first and foremost Church, strong and lovely in its faith, its grace, and its hierarchical communion, so that it can be a divine sign which distinguishes itself from temporal interests, not for reasons of ideology or cowardice, but

precisely to assist those interests more effectively, imbuing them with Christian meaning through its own competency and orienting them toward more authentic objectives and solutions.

We give thanks to God because, in our Diocese's current endeavors to achieve a "joint pastoral ministry," the varied vocations and charisms found among our priests, religious, and lay people find open before them a threefold path, namely, a pastoral ministry which is prophetic, liturgical, and social, in all the wide variety of forms required by our complicated modern world.

The Spirit "Lord and Giver of life"

On Pentecost the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and by the Son precisely to vitalize the structure and finality of the Church. This is what the Council teaches us in one of its most excellent theological syntheses, which we should receive as a true gift of the Spirit to the Church in our time:

"When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that He might continually sanctify the Church, and thus, all those who believe would have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father. He is the Spirit of Life, a fountain of water springing up to life eternal. To men, dead in sin, the Father gives life through Him, until, in Christ, He brings to life their mortal bodies. The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple. In them He prays on their behalf and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons. The Church, which the Spirit guides in way of all truth and which He unified in communion and in works of ministry, He both equips and directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with His fruits. By the power of the Gospel He makes the Church keep the freshness of youth. Uninterruptedly He renews it and leads it to perfect union with its Spouse. The Spirit and the Bride both say to Jesus, the Lord, 'Come!'" It would be difficult to describe with greater evangelical profundity and density the mysterious activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, as a communion which communicates truth and grace.

I

COMMUNICATION OF GRACE

The Church's noblest task

Holiness is what is characteristic of the Spirit, who is holy par excellence. In regard to the Church, therefore, the above cited Council text stresses this sanctifying activity through rich images taken from the Gospel, images such as the fountain of water flowing toward eternal life, the resurrection of those who were dead in their sins, the Spirit's dwelling in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple to pray for them and bear

witness that they are children of God, the unceasing rejuvenation or renewal of the Church by virtue of the Gospel, or the consummation of union with the Spouse...

These are all images which evoke the noblest task of a Church impelled by the Spirit of Pentecost: communicating grace. This is the true goal of Christian liberation and the true competency of the Church's labors: dignifying human beings to the point of making them, through conversion of heart and acceptance of grace, true children of God. Every other form of liberation, whether social, political, or economic, which fails to reach the depths of this liberation from sin or to scale the heights of the grace of divine adoption, is not genuine Christian redemption. The true development proclaimed by Pope Paul VI in his well-known encyclical "Populorum Progressio" begins from "the material poverty of those who lack the bare necessities of life, and the moral poverty of those who are crushed under the weight of their own self-love," and does not stop until it reaches "loving unity in Christ, who calls all people to share God's life as children of the living God, the Father of all" (20-21).

Our liturgical ministry

This is the Church's priestly function, its sanctifying role, where there is ample room for the collaboration of the whole Christian people, since we are all a priestly people. As priests, religious, and lay members, we move our Diocese toward a more fervent life in God's grace and toward a profound appreciation of our sacramental and liturgical life. Since the sacraments are the great official channels by which grace is communicated, we are worried about the lack of appreciation and the routine way in which many take part in the sacraments of Christian initiation and reconciliation (baptism, confirmation, eucharist, and penance) and about the lack of esteem in many marital unions for the sacrament of matrimony, which sanctifies the bases of family life.

Spiritual awakening

At the same time, we are delighted by the spiritual restlessness which the Holy Spirit is inciting in our lay folk, who are understanding better every day the sanctifying value of their own work. Retreats, spiritual conferences, cursillos in the faith, youth gatherings and the like are all evidence of a blossoming of realities and hopes in this field of the communication of grace.

Our missionary vocation

Deserving of special mention, since we consider it a singular gift of the Lord to our Diocese, is the news that we have been designated a "pilot Diocese for our country's missionary revitalization." Indeed, the missionary Spirit imparts a wondrous dynamism for moving Christians to live in God's grace, for that is what is required by our Christian vocation and our need to be made acceptable to God so that we can pray and work effectively for the conversion of those "without faith."

II

COMMUNICATION OF TRUTH

The “assistance” of the Holy Spirit

“The Spirit ... guides the Church toward all truth.”

With this laconic expression the Council evokes the assistance of the Holy Spirit promised by Christ to his Church (cf. Jn 16,13) for preserving integral the truth revealed by God and for communicating it with divine authority and certainty to all people.

The Magisterium of the Church

This is the reason for the existence of the “Magisterium of the Church,” which Christ entrusted directly to Peter and the College of Apostles and which by legitimate succession has reached us in the person of the Pope and the Bishops in communion with the Pope. The Council explains it thus:

“Bishops, teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth. ... Although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they nevertheless proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly whenever, even though dispersed through the world, but still maintaining the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter, and authentically teaching matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement on one position as definitively to be held” (LG 25).

The bishop thus becomes a human instrument of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church to the fullness of truth. He is “preacher of the faith and authentic teacher, endowed with the authority of Christ to proclaim to the people the faith which is to be believed and applied to their lives.”

The Bishop, non-technical Pastor

The bishop should have no problem with recognizing that others may have greater competency in the realm of human knowledge, including the theological sciences. He is not a technician in theology, nor is he one in sociology or politics. However, he cannot cede to anybody his role as teacher of the truth when it comes to proclaiming and defending the divine deposit of revealed faith and morals. The bishop's language does not aspire to the eloquence of human wisdom, but is rather the humble speech of the shepherd, who takes care that his flock not be deceived by false prophets and who inspires them to follow and love Christ their Master and Redeemer.

“My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2.4-5).

With this perspective and competency and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, I hope to accomplish my difficult prophetic mission. Even when denunciation is necessary, as it so often is today, my language will be that of a loving pastor, of one who has no enemies except those who deliberately will to be the enemies of Christ's truth. Using this criterion, I will watch out for and uphold the teachings of my beloved priests, the ecclesial movements, and the diocesan centers for education and social promotion.

Prophetic ministry

It is along this line that we should promote the prophetic aspect of the diocese's joint pastoral ministry, which is already taking shape with the enthusiastic participation of the laity.

Our people's "sense of the faith"

Pentecost should also inspire in all our priests a fervent gratitude to the Holy Spirit for this profound "sense of the faith" in our ordinary people; this is truly the touchstone of our ministry of the word.

Wherever I have visited in the towns and cantons, I have found this rich heritage of faith which Bishops, Pastors, Missionaries, Catechists, and Christian Families have long been instilling in the hearts of our people. It is quite clear to me that "the Holy Spirit enlightens and assists the People of God inasmuch as it is the Body of Christ united in a hierarchical communion. ... By this instinct of faith which is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, God's People accepts not the word of men but the very Word of God. It clings without fail to the faith once delivered to the saints, penetrates it more deeply by accurate insights, and applies it more thoroughly to life. All this it does under the lead of a sacred teaching authority to which it loyally defers" (Decl. "Mysterium Ecclesiae" 2, 24-VI-73).

Since we are beneficiaries of this heritage of our people and must transmit it, enriched, to our posterity, let us cultivate well, my fellow priests and lay apostles, that capacity for reflection and assimilation which our people possess, so that "there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts" (ibid.).

The dissemination of the Bible, the celebrations of the word, and the small reflection groups, when not manipulated by false interpretations but rather guided by faith, love, humility and prayer, are truly hopeful stimuli for this sense of the faith which God's people possesses.

III

HIERARCHICAL COMMUNION

The Church as institution

In order to communicate his grace and his truth to all people, Christ established the Church as a “hierarchical Communion,” which the Council describes as “a community of faith, hope and charity, a visible entity ... constituted and organized in the world as a society ... which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him” (LG 8).

Nowadays we see a pronounced tendency to reject this hierarchical or institutional aspect of the Church because people forget that this human structure does not exist as an end in itself but as a means or an instrument for communicating grace and truth. “For this reason, by no weak analogy, [the Magisterium] is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word. As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body” (LG 8).

Hierarchical and charismatic gifts

With this, we come to another precious aspect of the Holy Spirit’s activity in the Church, as the Council explains: “The Spirit unifies the Church in communion and in works of ministry; He both equips and directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with His fruits” (LC 4).

There are two ways, then, that the Spirit builds up Church unity: through communion, that is, interiorly, by way of gifts of grace called “charisms,” and through ministry, that is, exteriorly, by way of hierarchical authority or service.

These two orders, the charismatic and the hierarchical, are not opposed to each other, do not exclude each other, and do not follow separate paths; rather, they are both ordained to increasing Church unity, in accord with the well-known comparison of the body, in which the diversity of organs and functions cooperate together for the unity, well-being, and growth of the whole organism (cf. LG 7). “To each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12,7).

Hope of the Diocese

Pentecost gives us good reason to believe that it is precisely the great needs, limitations, and deficiencies of our Diocese that reveal to us the Holy Spirit’s desire to give us all the vocations and charisms that our Church needs. The Spirit is only waiting for a generous acceptance and response on our part, both as individuals and as community.

“These charisms,” the Council tells us, “whether they be the more outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church. Extraordinary gifts are not to be sought after, nor are the fruits of apostolic labor to be presumptuously expected from their use; but judgment as to their genuinity and proper use belongs to those who are appointed leaders in the Church, to whose special competence it belongs, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to that which is good” (LG 12).

The bishop, then, has the delicate responsibility of discerning the charisms and of ordering them to the common good of the Diocese and the Church. But it is the responsibility of all – bishop, priests, religious, and laity – to take cognizance of the special gifts or charisms the Spirit has given them, not with the idea of selfishly concealing them, like the lazy servant of the Gospel, but to make them available for the common good through humble service, frank dialogue, and warm collaboration.

For my part, I stress again my sincere desire to serve and to encourage dialogue both within the Diocese and throughout the Church’s universal reach, for every bishop, as a member of the episcopal college, is responsible also to the Church as a universal communion. “This also is important,” the Council states, “that by governing well their own church as a portion of the universal Church, they themselves are effectively contributing to the welfare of the whole Mystical Body, which is also the body of the churches” (LG 25).

Seminary Day

This vocational and charismatic activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church opens our heart wide to the most confident hope. Yes, let us be assured that the Holy Spirit is offering us the vocations and the charisms we need to make of our Diocese a flourishing portion of God’s Kingdom in the world.

Precisely for this reason Pentecost is Seminary Day, an opportune time for us to make a vigorous call to all parishes, to all families, to all youth movements and lay groups generally, to all schools and colleges, and to all who have some relation with young people and children: we want our youth to be saved “from the seduction of self-centered, hedonistic philosophies, from despair and nihilism, ... from instincts of violence and hatred”; we want them “to expand their hearts to the full dimensions of the world, to hear the call of their brothers and sisters, and to put all their energies fervently at their service...” (Message of the Council to Young People)

Social injustice an obstacle to communion

At the same time, we are seriously concerned about another obstacle in the way of the Spirit of Pentecost as he seeks to renew the Church and the world and to mold all men and women into the community of love which God desires and Jesus Christ requires as

a living witness of his coming into the world. We are referring to the injustice caused by the social, economic, and political inequality in which our people live.

My words as your pastor would not be complete if they made no reference to the alarming situation in which the Church must live and move in this region of the country, a region so rich in natural gifts but groaning, as Saint Paul would say, “beneath the slavery of corruption and awaiting the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8,21).

I don't mean to load this word down with demagogical overtones, nor is there need to depict in detail a reality which everyone sees and many endure, and which experts in the matter are able to describe far more competently than a pastor in the Church. The pastor's role is simply to raise his voice and summon people to loving responsibility, so that rich and poor love one another as the Lord commands (Jn 13,34), “because the strength of our charity is neither in hatred nor in violence” (Paul VI, 24-VIII-68).

For how can the Holy Spirit make our Diocese into a true communion of love if selfishness, resentment, and mistrust are allowed to prevail? And how can the vocations and the charisms which the Holy Spirit is stirring up flourish in a milieu in which some hearts become materialistic by excess of comfort while others are worn down by excess of distress?

Our social ministry

Already, thanks be to God, social ministry is developing in the Diocese, echoing the call of the Council to lay people – “to those who play a major role because of their competence in secular affairs.” “By their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them vigorously contribute their effort, so that created goods may be perfected by human labor, technical skill and civic culture for the benefit of all men according to the design of the Creator and the light of His Word. May the goods of this world be more equitably distributed among all men, and may they in their own way be conducive to universal progress in human and Christian freedom” (LG 36).

The same Pope reaffirmed the social concern and sensitivity manifested by the Latin American bishops when he indirectly exhorted the whole of society: “may your renewed apostolic impulse not be impeded by the lack of sensitivity on the part of some Christians to situations of injustice, ... and may that same impulse be capable of banishing the desire of some to adopt ideologies alien to the Christian spirit or to have recourse to violence” (Address to CELAM, 3-XI-74).

Blessed are the poor

All the same, I wish to remind those who are in need – not by reason of their vices or their disorderly lives – that their precarious situation has merited for them a preferential love on the part of Christ and his Church. Being better disposed to the virtue of poverty of spirit, which is not always just lack of material goods or passive conformity, the poor

have deserved to be mentioned in the first beatitude of the Divine Master, which urges on us that detachment of heart which will be required of all, both poor and rich, as an indispensable condition for entering into the kingdom of heaven. The paradise which a false idea of liberation seeks to construct on this earth is pure illusion; in contrast, the virtue of hope will always be necessary, even for those who have worldly wealth, for it trusts solely in God and promises the imperishable goods of the true paradise, which are far greater than earth's ephemeral goods.

CONCLUSION

TOWARDS A PERFECT UNION

The Holy Spirit: love and hope of the Church

The Council concludes its marvelous description of the Holy Spirit's divine activity in the Church by saying that the Spirit "renews it and leads it to perfect union with its Spouse. The Spirit and the Bride both say to Jesus, the Lord, 'Come!'" (LG 4).

No other outcome is possible for this history of salvation which is ordained by the Father, realized by the Son Jesus Christ, and carried to perfection by the Holy Spirit, "Lord and Giver of life," for the purpose of "elevating human beings to participate in the life of God" (LG 2).

The pilgrim Church cannot live without that "eschatological" tension as part of its eternal destiny. Only thus, impelled by that hope for "perfect union," can the Church, working in the midst of human affairs and temporal realities, be the "hierarchical communion of faith, hope, and love" which serves as an effective instrument of Jesus Christ, Teacher and Redeemer, for communicating to all people his truth and his grace.

May this reflection on Pentecost awaken, in all of us who make up the Diocese, a generous desire to "hear what the Spirit is saying" to the Church of Santiago de María, for just as he spoke to the churches of the Apocalypse, so does he continue to assign to each Diocese a special vocation and a special charism, and to grant individual vocations and charisms to all Christians, so that our desires for true community can become a reality.

Mary, crown of our reflection

We place our hopes for building up a Church in accord with the heart of God beneath the inspiration and protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

She is the master work of the Holy Spirit. For that reason the Church confesses that "in the most holy Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she is without spot or wrinkle ... Just as the Mother of Jesus, glorified in body and soul in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to

come, so too does she shine forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come" (LG 65.68).

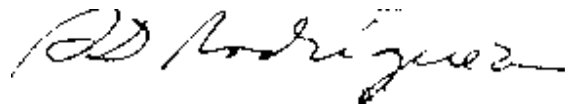
With our blessing.

Santiago de María, the feast of Pentecost, 18 May 1975.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "O. A. Romero", with a horizontal line underneath.

Bishop O. A. Romero

By his order,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Saúl David Rodríguez", written in a cursive style.

Saúl David Rodríguez
Fr. Chancellor