



Archbishop of Montreal

Homily
Saturday, May 30, 2020

Pentecost Sunday At the Vigil Mass – Year A (bilingual homily) Jn 7, 37-39

Recognizing the Primacy of God

Jesus stood up and cried out!

Jesus actually stood up and cried out, he cried out a message delivered in a powerful voice, a message that was important to give to us, a message for all humanity. When Jesus stands up and cries out, he speaks with strength. He addresses all humanity, each human being, every-where and at all times.

What is his message? What is he saying to all humanity? “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and to those who come to me I will give rivers of living water.” Not a trickle of water! Not a creek, but rivers of living water. And Jesus adds: “I will give you the Holy Spirit.”

What are your desires? What do you long for in life? What are your needs? What are the desires of your heart? What are the longings of your soul? What do you yearn for? Do you yearn for something? What are you yearning for?

What do you thirst for? How do you thirst for God? We can speak of desires with a lower case “d.” Or of needs with a lower case “n.” Some people aspire with a lower case “a!”

But the question here is about a great desire, a desire with an upper case “D.” The great desire that goes through our entire being. The great thirst that we experience not only in our soul but in our flesh, that we know in body and soul. In this sense, what is your thirst? Which thirst needs quenching? What is your thirst?

We have lived with the pandemic for over two months, and it feels as if time has come to a standstill. Perhaps, we have discovered that we had been taking many things for granted, such as going to Mass, celebrating the Eucharist, or receiving Holy Communion.

There are so many other things that we have taken for granted, such as our employment or our health. Today, we find ourselves at a crossroads and an opportunity to look at our life and ask, what do we thirst for? What are our priorities? What is most important in our life?

As we are going through this pandemic, it’s an occasion not to waste. There are two sides. It can put us down. It can also raise us up because it could be an occasion to rediscover something about life, about our life, about our family, about what we are really longing for. What do you want? What do we want, what do you want out of your life? Is there in your heart, in your soul, in your bones, in your flesh, a thirst so great that somehow, it hurts us to be thirsty? It’s aching just to be thirsty because you cannot find peace, you cannot rest until you find an answer to that thirst! Do you have an aching yearning? If you do, it’s a blessing. Because when we have an aching yearning, we are serious in looking for an answer. An answer to the meaning of our life. An answer to our quest for love. And we do not postpone to tomorrow, I’ll do it tomorrow, like

many things in life. Tomorrow I will look for a meaning to my life. No, not tomorrow! Today! I'm aching too much. I am looking for meaning to my life today.

When we feel a burning desire to search for meaning in our life, we are faced with discovering why we exist or for what purpose we are here. We are also faced with the longing of our heart, the longing for real love, an authentic love that transcends time, a love that endures through struggles, weaknesses and fragilities.

Thirst takes many forms, but one of them is certainly a thirst for an abiding life. We often speak of sustainable development, so we could say that it is a thirst for a sustainable life, an enduring life, as in a love that is everlasting! A love that is always greater! There is a thirst for a love that is true and authentic!

Listen to Jesus' cry: "Who is thirsty? Who is thirsty for life? Who is thirsty for love? Let them come to me, and I will quench their thirst."

"If you are aching, yearning for life, for love, come to me! I will answer your quest." But the gift of God is always a strange gift! Because the gift of God, is the gift of His love. This thirst, this is the first thirst to receive. To receive life, to receive eternal life. To receive love, to receive the love that comes from God! Infinite love! But at the same time, as God through the Holy Spirit gives us His love through Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected, He gives us His love. But at the same time, He brings with the gift of His love, another thirst.

We thirst for the love of God, we thirst to receive his life, a life that lasts, the eternal life, we thirst to receive the Holy Spirit. When we pray to God by naming of the Holy Spirit, we are praying equally in the name of the Father and of the Son.

What is then the correct name of the Holy Spirit? The name of the Holy Spirit is Love! The Holy Spirit is the love issued forth by the Father and the Son.

Therefore, Jesus can cry out: "Let him come to me, let her come to me, he who thirsts, she who thirsts, and I will give them rivers of living water, I will give them the Holy Spirit, I will give them Love!" We are made for Love.

Meanwhile, a thirst for love will lead us forward, much like a river, by the force of the current! We are swept by the river! But where will it bring us? To where will it lead?

In the first moment, God will respond to the deepest desires of our soul! That is the desire for love that is true, authentic, all encompassing and free! But where does it lead us?

As the Holy Spirit is given to us, He comes with His fire, His power, His Love, because He is Love! The Holy Spirit doesn't love us. He is Love given to us! He is the Love of God given to us! The Love of the Father and of the Son given to us. As He comes into our spirit, our heart, our soul, our flesh, our bones, as He comes within us like a river. You cannot be in the river and stay there! You're caught up in the river and you move with the river! When we receive the Holy Spirit, it's not about staying there and receiving the Love of God! It's about being moved by the Holy Spirit! Moved by His Love, moved by His breath. And move to where? Well He moves us! We cannot receive the Love of God without in the Holy Spirit, without being moved by the Holy Spirit.

While tomorrow, Sunday, the Church celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit, today we await this gift. In this Pentecost Vigil, we await the gift of the Holy Spirit, we wait to receive the Holy Spirit in us. Today, we want to have our thirst quenched, we are in a state of waiting for the Holy Spirit.

To be transparent, maybe we need to ask the question whether it is dangerous to receive the Holy Spirit! We need to ask, because we cannot deny that receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is certainly risky. Something will happen to our lives.

A new thirst will emerge in us, a thirst we did not have before! So far, we had a thirst to receive life and love! When we receive the Holy Spirit, a new thirst is created in us. What is this thirst? It is the thirst to give ourselves, to respond by giving ourselves! It is the thirst to love freely, totally without asking for anything, once and for all, with a thrust that brings forth all of our being! When we receive the Holy Spirit, our need to be loved becomes a need to love!

What gift! What a magnificent gift! What incredible gift!

During this pandemic, news concerning the danger of catching COVID-19, the risks linked to this virus, and the confinement and deconfinement are foremost on our minds. Know, however, that deep in our soul, God is at work. God is preparing us to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We cannot receive Him on our own, like other things.

God himself prepares us to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus prepared his apostles to receive the Holy Spirit. His public life, his passion, his death on the Cross, his resurrection, his appearing to his apostles and disciples, all of this was to prepare them to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In a mysterious way, the pandemic arrived during Lent! As we are experiencing its effects, we are called to convert, to come closer to Jesus Christ, to pray more, to do acts of mercy, to fast. During the pandemic, we might have been able to do these things with more commitment.

As we celebrate the Resurrection, we are called to renew our faith in Jesus Christ, in his life, in his presence in our lives, because Jesus Christ knocks without ceasing at the door of our heart.

The apostles and disciples were confined with Mary in the Upper Room, and they also knew confinement. Not only were they confined in the Upper Room, but they were troubled by fears!

Nevertheless, they prayed with Mary. They prayed with ardor, they prayed intensely in Mary's presence, in expectation of the fulfilment of the promise of Jesus Christ. We know how, after they received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the apostles came out of confinement and left on their mission. And the mission took them on a new adventure.

As we go from confinement to deconfinement, perhaps making adjustments in our priorities, we can look to the apostles and disciples who remained with Mary, praying together, waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room. They, too, lived confinement, waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Do we wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit? Jesus

told them that they could not go out on mission unless they received the Holy Spirit because they would not have been able to accomplish their mission. It is that way, we might dream of it and perhaps want to swing into action right away, but we need to wait on the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, it would be impossible to fully witness to God's life and love, or to bear witness to the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Just like the apostles, we remain with Mary in prayer, waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit that will transform our lives. This vigil today is a time of waiting. Tomorrow will be the time to receive the gift. We need to be aware, however, that we cannot receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and not be transformed by it. We are indeed transformed by the Holy Spirit. This trans-formation will lead to another thirst. This is the thirst of loving, the thirst of giving ourselves over totally, freely, once and for all in a continual offering of ourselves. It is one thing to have a thirst to be loved, but somehow, when we receive the gift of love in life, from the Holy Spirit, we also receive the thirst to love. It is the thirst to respond to the love of God, by loving God and others.

Since we are at the Vigil for Pentecost, we can pray together that in receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, our heart will be renewed and we will have a new impetus, a new freedom, a new strength, a new peace to witness to Jesus Christ in the world. That is because, through the Church, through the people of God, through each baptized person, each missionary-disciple,

Jesus Christ, through all of us, wants to cry out to the world; “Those who thirst, come to me. I will give you rivers of living water.”

We have a choice in how we view this pandemic. We can focus on waiting for it to end, waiting for “normal” to return or for a “new normal” to emerge, or we can see it as a time to reflect on our own frailties, our own priorities and the meaning of our lives. We are being offered a unique opportunity to grow as we live through it. We can become better persons, better families, a better Church, a better society.

Think about how the pandemic has shaken things up. The powerful of this world have been somehow shaken by this pandemic. What remains when all is not destroyed but shaken? What is left? The person with their dignity, every human being on the face of the earth, the family as a nucleus of society and as a nucleus of the Church, and God. Through this pandemic, the only one able to reach out and touch everyone on the face of the earth is God. Nobody else can do that. The only one with the power to comfort, sustain, nourish, lighten burdens, and console every human being on the earth, is God. Nobody else can do that. No power of this world can do that.

As we slowly move from confinement to deconfinement, beyond our expectations of a new normal or a return to normal, perhaps we can renew our prayer for growth through this pandemic, to come out on the other side, changed for the better. A better person, a better family, a better Church. Also, as a Church, recognizing and being well acquainted with all of the challenges of evangelizing, this might be an opportunity to renew our faith that God is truly at work. God truly is at work. He was at work yesterday, today and will be at work tomorrow.

Perhaps in our difficulties with evangelization, what is missing is faith in the work of God! The faith that God is truly at work, at work in people’s hearts! We are instruments of a God who is at work, and who has the power to work and touch hearts. In the end, only God has the power to touch each human being, each human heart. Somehow, there is no one who is closer to any one of us as God is. God is closer to us than we are to ourselves! May this pandemic be a time of new awareness of the importance of God and that God comes first.

Let us recognize the primacy of God.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

† Christian Lépine
Archbishop of Montreal