



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## GENERAL AUDIENCE

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1. As soon as the Holy Spirit had come down upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, they “began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (cf. *Acts* 2:4). Thus we can say that the Church, at the moment of her birth, receives as a gift from the Spirit the ability to “tell [of] the mighty works of God” (*Acts* 2:11): this is the gift of *evangelizing*. This fact implies and reveals a basic law of salvation history: it is impossible to evangelize or prophesy, or indeed to speak of the Lord and in the Lord’s name, without the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. Using a biological analogy, we could say that just as human words are carried by the human breath, so the Word of God is transmitted by God’s breath, by his *ruach* or his *pneuma*, which is the Holy Spirit.

2. This connection between God’s Spirit and the divine word can already be noted in the experience of the ancient prophets. Ezekiel’s call is described as a “spirit” entering into his person: “[The Lord] said to me: ‘Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak with you’. And when he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet; and I heard him speaking to me” (*Ex* 2:1-2). In the Book of Isaiah we read that the future servant of the Lord will proclaim justice to the nations precisely because the Lord has put his Spirit upon him (cf. *Is* 42:1). According to the prophet Joel, the messianic age will be marked by a universal outpouring of the Spirit: “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (*Jl* 2:28); as a result of this communication of the Spirit, “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (*ibid.*).

3. The Spirit-Word relationship reaches its summit in Jesus: indeed he is the very Word made flesh “through the work of the Holy Spirit”. He begins to preach “in the power of the Spirit” (cf. *Lk* 4:14ff.). The very first time he preaches in Nazareth, he applies to himself the passage from Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ... he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (*Lk* 4:18). As the fourth Gospel stresses, the mission of Jesus, “he whom God has sent” and who “utters the words of God”, is the fruit of the gift of the Spirit, whom he has received and gives “not by measure” (cf. *Jn* 3:34). Appearing to his disciples in the Upper Room on Easter evening, Jesus performs the expressive act of “breathing” upon them, saying: “Receive the Holy Spirit” (cf. *Jn* 20:21-22). The Church’s life unfolds beneath that breath. “The Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church’s mission” (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 21). The Church proclaims the Gospel through his presence and saving power. Addressing the Christians of Thessalonica, St Paul says: “Our Gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 *Thes* 1:5). St Peter describes the Apostles as “those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1 *Pt* 1:12). But what does “preach the good news through the Holy Spirit” mean? Briefly one can say: it means evangelizing *in the power, in the newness and in the*

unity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> Evangelizing in the power of the Spirit means being invested with that power which was supremely manifested in Jesus' evangelizing activity. The Gospel tells us that those who listened to him were astonished at his teaching because "he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes" (*Mk* 1:22). Jesus' word drives out demons, calms storms, heals the sick, forgives sinners and raises the dead. Jesus' authority is bestowed by the Spirit, as an Easter gift, on the Church. Thus we see the Apostles filled with *parrhesia*, i.e., that boldness which enables them to speak fearlessly about Jesus. Their adversaries were filled with wonder "when they ... perceived that they were uneducated, common men" (*Acts* 4:13). Thanks to the gift of the Spirit of the New Covenant, Paul too can say in all truth: "Since we have such a hope, we are very bold" (*2 Cor* 3:12). This power of the Spirit is more necessary than ever for the Christians of our time who are asked to bear witness to their faith in a world which is often indifferent, if not hostile and deeply marked by relativism and hedonism. It is a power essential to all preachers who must offer the Gospel anew without yielding to compromises and false short-cuts, by proclaiming the truth about Christ "in season and out of season" (*2 Tm* 4:2).<sup>5</sup> The Holy Spirit also guarantees that the message is always fresh and timely, so that preaching does not fall into an empty repetition of formulas and a cold application of methods. Indeed, preachers must be at the service of the "New Covenant", which is not "in a written code" that kills, but "in the Spirit" who gives life (cf. *2 Cor* 3:6). It is not a question of spreading a service under the "old written code", but the "new life of the Spirit" (cf. *Rom* 7:6). This requirement is particularly vital today for the "new evangelization", which will truly be "new" in its ardour, method and expression, if those who proclaim the marvels of God and speak in his name have first listened to God and have become docile to the Holy Spirit. Contemplation consisting of listening and prayer is thus fundamental. If the preacher does not pray, he will end up "preaching himself" (cf. *2 Cor* 4:5) and his words will be reduced to "godless chatter" (cf. *2 Tm* 2:16).<sup>6</sup> Lastly, the Spirit accompanies and encourages the Church to evangelize in unity and to build unity. Pentecost occurred when the disciples "were all together in one place" (*Acts* 2:1) and "all with one accord devoted themselves to prayer" (*Acts* 1:14). After receiving the Holy Spirit, Peter speaks to the crowd for the first time, "standing *with the Eleven*" (*Acts* 2:14): he is the icon of a unanimous proclamation which must continue to be such even when preachers are scattered throughout the world. For all Christians, preaching Christ under the impetus of the one Spirit on the threshold of the third millennium involves a concrete and generous effort towards full communion. It is the great task of ecumenism, which should be supported with ever renewed hope and active commitment, even if the times and results are in the hands of the Father, who asks us for humble readiness in accepting his plan and the inner inspirations of the Spirit.

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*To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:* I welcome the Sisters of the Resurrection who have come to Rome for their General Chapter. May the Holy Spirit guide you in all your decisions. I also welcome the delegation from the Polish American Congress. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Scotland, Canada, Australia, Japan and the United States of America, I cordially invoke God's blessings of joy and peace.