

The Solemnity of Pentecost A - Religion from Within

May 24, 2026

A brilliant man with Doctorate Degrees and honors from most major universities, took a sabbatical. He decided to devote as much time as it would take to learn all he could about Jesus. He studied ancient Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic so he could read the earliest texts about Jesus. He studied Ignatius, Justin, Augustine, Aquinas, and all the famous theologians of the centuries focusing on learning about Jesus. He read the works of modern theologians, Rahner, Schillebeck and so many others. He took courses in German and Dutch to better understand them. After years of studying he wrote his own book about Jesus. It was an instant success not just in the academic circles, but in every Christian and even non-Christian Church. The man, the esteemed professor was called upon to give talks about Jesus to all sorts of groups, from seminarians to atheists. His lectures always ended with a question and answer period. Usually, there was no one in the audience who could ask a question that the brilliant man had not been asked before or for which he did not have an answer at the tip of his tongue. No one, until an elderly man raised his hand after one lecture. The old man asked: "How is it that someone who has studied as much as you have learned so little?" What? What kind of a person would dare question the great scholar, the great professor? After the commotion settled down, the scholar responded, "I am sure that I have much more to learn about Jesus, but why do you say that I have learned so little?" He asked the old man who said, "You have Jesus in your head, but you do not have him in your heart."

Knowledge of Christ comes from the head, but knowing Christ comes from the heart. His Spirit must be within us. And this is the great gift of Pentecost, the solemnity we celebrate today. The Spirit of the Lord has been given to us so that we don't just know about the Lord, we know the Lord. The great fallacy of religious education is the concept that intellectual knowledge makes a person a Christian. Some parents participate in this fallacy by demanding their children go to religious education but never worship with the community. Some priests participate in this fallacy by determining a person's admission into a sacrament by the quality or maybe even quantity of his answers to catechetical questions. There is no academic test to determine one's Faith. The descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles in the upper room when they were at prayer with Mary changed them from a fearful group to courageous men guiding them to announce the Good News of the mighty acts of God. Since then, the Holy Spirit has been a permanent presence and a tower of strength in guiding, guarding and directing its course. The Holy Spirit brings us into a loving relationship with God, who invited us to become his adopted sons and daughters. God has breathed his life into our bones giving us an opportunity to share in his eternal life. But we must change our ways and make room for the Spirit of the living God to dwell within us. We must have an attitude of prayerfulness to discover our special talents and the particular role we are called to play in the mission of the church. Once we discover our own particular gifts there is an obligation on us to use them in building up the Body of Christ.

Knowledge of answers does not make a person a Christian. No, Jesus makes a

person a Christian, and he does this by giving us his Spirit. St. Paul learned this lesson the hard way. The Acts of the Apostles records one of St. Paul's greatest failures. He went to Athens with Barnabas, convinced that he could convert the Athenians by meeting them on their own ground, in the field of philosophy. Paul began by speaking about the Temple to an unknown god he had come upon in Athens. He figured he would wow them by pointing out that this temple shows the Athenians were searching for Jesus. Jesus was the answer to all their intellectual inquiries. But the people who heard Paul walked away, obviously unconvinced. Very few returned to become Christian. From that point on, Paul was not concerned with intellectual arguments, instead he spoke about how the Love of the Lord had transformed his life. Paul went from Athens to Corinth and spoke about the Cross of Jesus, his death for love, his life, the gift of his love. At Corinth the people had an encounter with the Spirit of Jesus within Paul and many became Christian.

As a deacon, so often I am edified by people who radiate the presence of the Lord without spewing out intellectual insights. There is something about the truly holy that draws me to an experience of the Lord. What is this something? It is the Spirit. They possess the Spirit of Christ. And it is these, truly spiritual people throughout the ages, who have drawn others to embrace the Lord. The apostles spoke on Pentecost Sunday, and people of all different languages heard the Spirit speaking to them. How about us? We have also been called to be apostles. Can we allow the Spirit to speak through us? Yes, if we allow ourselves to be tied to Jesus in our hearts, not just have knowledge about him in our heads. That is what the word religion means: being tied, being tied to the Lord. St Basil the Great says, "The Spirit is the source of holiness, a spiritual light, and he offers his own light to every mind to help it in its search for truth. By nature, the Spirit is beyond the reach of our mind, but we can know him by his goodness. The power of the Spirit fills the whole universe, but he gives himself only to those who are worthy, acting in each according to the measure of his faith." The Spirit of Jesus has been gifted to us not just for ourselves, but for a world that longs for meaning in life. Pentecost is the celebration of the present reality of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in our lives. Today we pray that we might allow the Spirit to radiate the presence of Christ within us to a world that longs for an experience of its Savior.

"The Lord Jesus said to his disciples: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you forever' (Jn 14: 15-16). Here the praying heart of Jesus is revealed to us, his filial and fraternal heart. This prayer reaches its apex and its fulfillment on the Cross, where Christ's invocation is one with the total gift of himself, and thus his prayer becomes, so to speak, the very seal of his self-gift out of love of the Father and humanity. Jesus' prayers that of the Last Supper and that on the Cross form a single prayer that continues even in heaven, where Christ sits at the right hand of the Father. Jesus, in fact, always lives his intercessional priesthood on behalf of the people of God and humanity and so prays for all of us, asking the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, on the Solemnity of Pentecost, 23 May 2010)