

VATICAN CITY, 31 MAY 2009 (VIS) - At 9.30 a.m. today, the Holy Father celebrated Mass in the Vatican Basilica for the Solemnity of Pentecost. During the ceremony, the Cologne chamber orchestra and cathedral choir played the last Mass composed by Haydn the bi-centenary of whose death falls this year.

In his homily the Pope spoke of the signs of Pentecost, the commemoration of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Mary and the Apostles in the Cenacle in Jerusalem in the form of "tongues of fire" and a "violent wind".

"What air is for biological life, so is the Holy Spirit for spiritual life", said Benedict XVI, "and just as there is atmospheric pollution which poisons the environment and the people who live in it, so there is a pollution of the heart which mortifies and poisons spiritual existence".

Among the "many products that pollute the mind and the heart", the Pope mentioned "images that make a spectacle of pleasure, violence or contempt for man and woman", and he highlighted the importance "of breathing clean air, both physical air with the lungs and, spiritual air with the heart, the healthy air of the spirit Who is love".

Referring then to the image of the fire, the Pope pointed out that "having possessed himself of the energy of the cosmos - the 'fire' - man today seem to present himself as God, and wishes to transform the world while excluding, marginalising, or even rejecting the Creator of the universe. Man no longer wants to be the image of God but of himself, and declares his own autonomy, freedom and maturity".

"In the hands of such a person, the 'fire' and its enormous potential become dangerous", the Holy Father warned. "They can turn against life and against humanity itself, as history unfortunately shows. The tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki remain as a perennial admonition where atomic energy, used for bellicose ends, ended up causing death on an unprecedented scale".

Later in his homily, the Holy Father explained how, with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the Apostles lost their fear. "They were not longer afraid because they felt themselves to be in the hands of the strongest. ... When the Spirit of God enters", he explained, "it drives out fear and makes us know and feel that we are in the hands of an Omnipotence of love. Whatever happens, His infinite love will not abandon us.

"This is clear from the witness of the martyrs", he added in conclusion, "from the courage of the confessors of the faith, the intrepid energy of missionaries, the forthrightness of preachers, and the example of all the saints, some of whom were just adolescents and children. It is clear from the very existence of the Church which, despite the limitations and sins of man, continues to traverse the ocean of history, impelled by the breath of God and animated by His purifying fire".

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