

- Last Sunday I spoke about our magnificent human dignity. Through our Lord's Ascension, our weak human nature was raised, as Pope St. Leo the Great says, "above the dignity of the whole heavenly creation, above the ranks of angels, above the exalted status of archangels."
- When we are baptized and all of our sins are washed away, our souls shine with the very glory of Heaven. Through this marvelous sacrament we are made members of the Church, members even of Christ's own Body, as we bear the glory of His sanctifying grace.
- Yet we mar that glory and diminish our magnificent human dignity through our sins, tethering ourselves to this earth rather than preparing ourselves for the full weight glory we hope to bear in Heaven.
- Thus, each person is like an invaluable piece of gold, which because of our sinfulness, is in need of refining. This refining of our souls occurs either in this life through the fiery love and power of the Holy Spirit, or in the next life through the purifying fires of Purgatory.
- But we must all pass through a fiery refinement process, for only those who have been perfected can go to Heaven. This is why Jesus tells us in Matthew's Gospel "to be perfect as [our] heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).
- To be perfected means to be freed from our sins and of our attachment to sin. You see, God and sin are mutually exclusive; they cannot exist together. As Heaven is complete and total union with God, we must be free from all sin in order to be united with Him.
- So to be perfected such that we can go to Heaven requires that we be forgiven our sins and desire not to commit them again. But it also means that we must make reparation for the temporal punishment due for our sins.
- The good news is that we have the Holy Spirit to help us, for the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier.
- Today Holy Mother Church celebrates one of Her most important feast days: Pentecost. This is the day each year that we recall the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Our Lady and the Apostles – just as Jesus promised.
- Falling upon them like fire, and allowing them to speak and understand different languages, it was the Holy Spirit Who enabled the apostles to fulfill the command our Lord gave them at His Ascension to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world.
- It was the Holy Spirit Who filled the apostles with the zeal and courage necessary to not only preach the Gospel, but to endure the concomitant hardships that came along with preaching the Gospel, and to even die as martyrs.
- It was the Holy Spirit Who filled the apostles with the virtues of faith, hope, and charity so that they could live out our newborn Catholic faith with integrity and fulfill God's will.
- It was the Holy Spirit who helped the Apostles move beyond their sins and weaknesses in order to spread the Faith throughout the world.
- In short, it was the Holy Spirit that made the apostles holy. This same Holy Spirit Who perfected the apostles and set them on fire with love for God and for His Kingdom can do the same thing for us!
- If we have been baptized and confirmed, then we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit in the same way as the apostles did. While there may not have been any tongues of flame or strong rushing winds at our Confirmation, we know by faith that the Sacrament of Confirmation is our own personal Pentecost!

- Sadly, our sins warp and misshape us. Every sin leaves a mark. Our sins mar that image of who God has created us to be, and they damage our relationship with God.
- Thus, perfection is not something we can gain on our own. We need the help of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit Who remolds us into an image of Christ: into that person God has created us to be. The Holy Spirit reshapes, restores, and perfects us after we sin.
- Of course, the Sacraments are the primary means by which we experience the healing and perfecting power of the Holy Spirit. It is through the Sacraments that we are forgiven our sins and given the grace to resist future temptations.
- Yet, with every sin we commit, we not only mar our human dignity, but we incur a debt against God's justice that we must repay. This is precisely why the priest gives us a penance when we go to confession.
- While the Absolution the priest prays over us in confession forgives our sins, we must restore the balance of justice with God that we disrupted by our sins by doing penance. Doing penance is the way we repay our debt against God.
- Now keep in mind that this is not a mathematical equation or an exercise in spiritual accounting. Penance must be an exercise of LOVE! It's love that matters here!
- It's the love with which we do our penance that makes our penance efficacious in making reparation for our sins and remitting the temporal punishment due for them. As St. Catherine of Siena said, 1 Hail Mary said with perfect love is enough to atone for the sins of a lifetime!
- Above our altar we have an image of the Holy Spirit as a dove, and surrounding that dove are the words: "Come Holy Spirit, enkindle in us the fire of Your love."
- This is exactly what He does for us when we seek to live our lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit: He enkindles within us the fire of His love, a love that purifies and refines us, that restores us and makes us capable of making reparation for our sins.
- So how do we live under the influence of the Holy Spirit so that we may love as we should? It begins simply by seeking God's will in all things. We cannot hope that the Holy Spirit will work within us if we are consciously contravening God's will.
- This means that we practice our Catholic Faith with integrity, being obedient to the teachings and tenets of our Faith. It means that we must frequent the Sacraments, most especially Holy Communion and Confession, receiving them worthily and well.
- We must also practice the virtues of faith, hope, and especially charity, as well as the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit, that were planted within our souls at Baptism and strengthened within us at Confirmation.
- The more that we strive to practice these virtues and use these gifts, the more they grow within us and become habits. The more the virtues become habits for us, the more beautiful and perfected our souls become!
- But we must also pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide our words and actions, to purify our thoughts, and to guard our souls. We must seek to have a relationship with the Holy Spirit in prayer, begging Him to influence everything we do.
- My brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit is a refining fire Who can burn away our sins and restore us to that perfect image of Christ that God desires us to be. He is the Sanctifier Who prepares us for union with God in Heaven by enkindling within us the fire of His love.
- May we live our lives in such a way as to receive this refining fire, and may that fire burn brightly within us so that not only may we be perfected, but that we might help lead others to perfection as well.