

Homily for the Mass of the End of the Academic Year 2020-21
Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas
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"We have - indeed, brothers and sisters, we have - a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" (Heb 8:1).

Indeed, having gloriously ascended into heaven, Jesus Christ is now at the right hand of the Father where, as the only mediator between God and man, he fulfils the priestly office. That is to say, Jesus in his now glorified humanity prays for us, intercedes for us. "We have a Paraclete - an advocate, an intercessor - with the Father: Jesus Christ, the righteous one" (1 Jn 2:1), "ever living to make intercession for us" (Heb 7:25). It is precisely this prayer of Christ which today, as I speak to you, carries, sustains and guides the life of the Church and each of our lives. The Eternal Word, the Son who, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, "sustains everything by his powerful word" (Heb 1:3), this same Word, once made man, carries, sustains and directs the life and mission of the Church by his most effective prayer.

This very priestly work is what Jesus began here below, as seen in Chapter 17 of Saint John - the priestly prayer, from the Gospel we just heard. As the High Priest did on the day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) in the Old Covenant, Jesus, at the hour of consecrating himself, that is, of offering himself as a sacrifice, addresses a solemn prayer to the Father, for himself, for his own and for all the people.

What is the effect of this prayer? Nothing other than the fulfillment of the promise, that is the gift of the Holy Spirit. A fundamental gift that contains in itself all the other gifts. "I will pray to the Father and he will give you another Paraclete [...], the Spirit of truth" (Jn 14,16-17). This Spirit, we are waiting for in those days before Pentecost. Gathered in the Upper Room, with the Mother of Jesus, we await the great epiclesis, the descent of the Spirit, who never ceases, through the Word and the sacraments, to give birth to the Body of Christ, the Church.

Now, among the effects that we expect from the coming of the Spirit, I would like to mention three that will enlighten our Christian life at the Angelicum: unity, mission, and contemplation.

The first effect is unity: "May they all be one". Unity among believers resulting from the intimate communion of each with Christ. Unity that manifests to the world the original mystery of Trinitarian communion. Now, a University is by definition a generator of unity. First, the unity of knowledge which, while respecting epistemological distinctions, is, so to speak, assumed, recapitulated and transfigured in the sapiential synthesis of Theology. Then, the very concrete unity of our international community of teachers and students who strive to implement on a small scale the mystery of unity in the diversity of the great Catholic Church.

The second effect of the coming of the Holy Spirit is obviously mission, which maintains close ties with unity. Indeed, unity is at the service of mission: "May they all be one [...] so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17 21). In fact, unity is so unspontaneous, so unnatural for men, turned-in on themselves because of sin, that unity is like a miracle testifying to the invisible presence and action of the Spirit in the community. But unity is not only a "means" for mission; it is also the goal of mission. The purpose of mission is in fact to communicate, to expand, to extend ecclesial unity in order to integrate into it people of every race, language and culture. "They will become one flock" (Jn 10:16). Those of us who are about to conclude a cycle of studies and return home - even all of us who are about to go on vacation (after the small formality of exams) - like the apostles on leaving the Upper Room, we are sent to "speak of the great works of God" (Acts 2:11), to create communion in communicating the serene light of the intelligence of faith, nourished, intensified, throughout the time of our studies. *Contemplata aliis tradere.* To transmit to others what has been contemplated.

Indeed, **contemplation is a third effect of the coming of the Spirit.** By contemplation, I do not mean here the extraordinary forms of the life of prayer, which are in any case difficult to share, but the theological knowledge of the mysteries of faith insofar as it is a source of light, rest and peace for both the intellect and the heart. As you have experienced, the intellectual life is not a journey of uninterrupted pleasures. It is a continuous search, often exhausting. It is a struggle, an asceticism. It is by the sweat of our brow that we snatch a few shreds of light and truth. But sometimes it happens that the mind stops, rests in the synthetic vision of the harmony between the mysteries of faith. It happens that it is in awe of the beauty of God's design.... Contemplation.

St. Thomas has given us a fascinating theological meditation on the effects of the mission of the Holy Spirit. It is found in chapters 20 through 22 of the 4th book of the *Summa contra gentiles*. I say this for those who would still be hesitant about the vacation reading schedule. Between a Mary Higgins Clark detective story and the investigations of Inspector Montalbano, I recommend the *Summa contra gentiles*! However, in those chapters, St. Thomas links all the effects attributed by sacred Scripture to the Holy Spirit to the fact that in the immanent Trinity the Spirit is the proceeding Love. Now, among these effects, contemplation comes first because it results from friendship with God, that is, from charity "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5). Now, "the most particular thing about friendship," writes Thomas, "is living together (conversing) with the friend. Now man's coexistence with God comes about through contemplation of Him [...]. Therefore, since the Holy Spirit makes us lovers of God (*Dei amatores*), it follows that by the work of the Holy Spirit we are established as contemplators of God (*Dei contemplatores*)". The Spirit makes us contemplatives and contemplators.

Now, this contemplation is also capable of illuminating, indirectly, the practical order, that is, the ways to be taken, in the very concrete circumstances of life, to bring about union with God. Contemplation supports and nourishes discernment, which is so necessary especially for those whose mission it is to lead the community. Precisely, this discernment based on contemplation was perhaps the most characteristic charism of the (modern day) founder of the Angelicum, Blessed Hyacinth-Marie Cormier. In him, the Holy Spirit shaped the model of the ruler, rooted in contemplation of God and at the same time capable of passing the light of the intelligence of faith into the concreteness of situations. Therefore, at the end of this academic year, in which there has been no lack of difficulties of every kind (unfortunately not only speculative ones), we thank the Lord for the work done by Fr. Michal Paluch as Rector and we entrust to the intercession of Blessed Cormier the one who will be called to succeed him. May he "in the charity of truth", sustained by our unfailing collaboration, know how to serve the splendid mission of our University in *medio Ecclesiae*.