

“COME, HOLY SPIRIT FILL THE HEARTS OF THE FAITHFUL!”

Homily of His Eminence, Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke, at St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles Church, Corpus Christi, TX on Pentecost Sunday, May 24, 2026

1. Preamble

Today is Pentecost Sunday – the birthday of the Church. Pentecost was a festival already celebrated by the Jews. But the Pentecost after the death and resurrection of Jesus, was one with a difference. As usual, people of different nationalities and languages gathered in Jerusalem. But it pleased God to use the occasion to inaugurate the Church through the descent of the Holy Spirit. Here we are, celebrating the birth of the Church – our mother and teacher. Her birth was marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We are gathered to pray for a fresh outpouring of the same Holy Spirit on the Church Universal, on the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV; on all the Bishops – on Bishop Mario Alberto Avilés, C.O, the bishop of the Diocese of Corpus Christi; on all the pastors – especially on our pastor – Riju Thottankara, and on all of us, the Christian faithful. I humbly request you to take a moment and make a personal supplication to the Holy Spirit to take charge of your life, to enlighten your mind, to enkindle the fire of God’s love in your heart and in your family and relationships.

2. On a Personal Note

On a personal note, today is a special day for me. My episcopal motto is “Veni Sancte Spiritus!” – “Come Holy Spirit.” This is inspired by the Pentecost event. Each of us is supposed to have a guiding principle or ideal. From my life experiences, I have come to realize how much we need the Holy Spirit in our lives. At the time of my episcopal appointment, and when it became obligatory to present a motto, I did not have to look for one. I already had one –

our constant need for the Holy Spirit in our lives, as individuals and as communities. It is my pleasure to share this conviction with you on this special day. I will consider this aim achieved if we go home today with two things: first, a conviction of our need for the constant assistance of the Holy Spirit and second, indications of how to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit.

3. Not by Power, not by Might, but By God's Spirit – Zech 4:6

As human beings, we tend to think that everything depends on us. Human beings have always succumbed to the temptation of wanting to be masters of their own destiny. That was the sin of our first parents – Adam and Eve. They wanted to be like God, knowing good from evil. Technological advancement has increased this confidence in human ability. Technology has compressed space and time, making the world seem like a global village where people can easily communicate with others, thousands of miles away. Yet, the advancements in science and technology have not translated into greater peace, harmony, happiness, and justice. People are lonelier. There are many violent conflicts in the world and there are festering wounds in the hearts of people and families. Ironically, the more human beings try to fix the problems according to human vision and logic, the more the solutions throw up other challenges. This shows that we must recognize that it is not by human power or by human might or ability. We need learn to trust God and to surrender. We must seek insights, energy and power from on high – the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised his disciples before his ascension.

4. No one can say that “Jesus is Lord!” unless he is under the Influence of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3)

Scriptures show us that something as basic as confessing that “Jesus is Lord!” is not possible unless through the power of the Holy

Spirit. The Holy Spirit is our advocate; the one who pleads for us before the Father. The Spirit also helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us before the Father with groans too deep for words (Rom 8:26). The Holy Spirit gives a variety of gifts for the good of humanity. The Holy Spirit is the source of our unity and reconciliation. Without the Holy Spirit, we will not be able to serve God with the required vigour and commitment. Remember the apostles. It was only when they received the Holy Spirit that they could go out and boldly proclaim the Good News. Similarly, we cannot live out the faith as individuals or as the Church without being empowered by God's Spirit.

5. Come Holy Spirit!

Having seen how much we need the Holy Spirit for our lives, how do we ensure that we remain open to the Holy Spirit? First, realize that we have received the Holy Spirit at Baptism, Confirmation, and in the sacraments. The Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts. The Spirit is already in us. Honor the Spirit who dwells in you and is at work in the Church. Second, appreciate the mystery of the Church as the community called together by God the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Get involved in the life of the Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, and this way contribute to building up a new humanity, bound together in love, truth and service. Third, as said above, we need to give up the human tendency to be in charge of our lives. Strive to trust God. Learn to surrender and let God lead you. Consciously seek always, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to live, not according to your will but, according to God's plan and vision. Finally, invoke the Spirit unceasingly and accept the Holy Spirit's invitation to friendship with God.

As we do these, may the Holy Spirit enkindle in us the fire of God's love and bring peace to our troubled world, our troubled families and our troubled souls - Amen.