

Your Excellencies

Representatives of his Beatitude and all of Orthodox and Evangelical Churches,

My siblings, the priests, brothers, sisters, and all the consecrated,

Representatives of the religious, civil, and security authorities,

Brothers and sisters,

18/06/2016

This evening, we meet at the Maronite Patriarchal Exarchate in Jerusalem to celebrate together, according to the Eastern calendar, the feast of Pentecost, so that the Holy Spirit would pour out upon us all his light as he poured it out upon the apostles and the disciples at the dawn of Christianity. They went out in the whole world, announcing the good news, so that we can be one in thoughts, heart, and deeds. Thus we can carry the good news and live the unity with joy and peace as the apostles did. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read "and they accepted his preaching and were baptized; on that day, three thousand people joined them and were faithful to the teaching of the apostles, the breaking of the bread, and prayer".

With this spirit, we came today to hear the word of God and celebrate **the Eucharist**, from all the Christian Churches, and to open our hearts and minds to the work of the Holy Spirit and to listen to his inspiration, which invites us to embody the meaning of this event. Thus we would follow in the footsteps of the apostles, who were witnesses to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the world, to all people, Muslims and Jews, among others, irrespective of their color, race, or gender.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke, the evangelist, speaks about the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples, who were gathered on the fiftieth day after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead. Beforehand, Luke speaks about the Ascension, which took place forty days after the resurrection. But he did not separate between the two

events in his gospel; nor did John the evangelist separate between the descent of the Holy Spirit and the resurrection of the Lord.

Therefore, the events of the Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost are one historical and theological event, though the ecclesiastical and liturgical celebration has separated them. As is known, the number forty symbolizes the complete period of time, i.e. the seven weeks, and therefore it is called in the Torah "the feast of the weeks" or the Pentecost, which in Hebrew means "the gathering". This feast commemorates the memorial of the giving of the Torah to Moses and of the making of the covenant between God and his people through Moses on the day of gathering at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

This was the goal of the coming out from Egypt, this is the feast of Passover. Luke applied this tradition to the new Christian community. On the fiftieth day of the exodus from Egypt, God gave his people the law at Sinai, and on the fiftieth day of the death and resurrection of Jesus and his ascension to the Father, Jesus gave his apostles the Holy Spirit, the law of the new covenant.

As we reflect on the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear Luke speaking also about the following elements: the sound like the roaring of a windstorm in the skies, the tongues of fire, and the speaking in tongues. All these are a sign of the power of the Holy Spirit, who descended on the apostles and disciples and, in a way, united the language that multiplied in Babel. He showed the all-encompassing message of the apostles and demonstrated that he is the one who grants the apostles what to say. The list of people is symbolic; it represents all the people of the earth. St Peter speaks for the first time as the one in charge among the Twelve, and he cites the prophecy of Joel on the pouring of the Holy Spirit in the last Messianic days.

Pentecost is at the same time the beginning of an ecclesial liturgical period; it lasts until September 14, the feast of the Triumph of the Cross. This period is called the Pentecost-tide. It is the time of the Holy Spirit, who continues in us the work of the Father and the

Son. It is also the time of the Church, who lives in the Holy Spirit the mystery of Christ, the living redeemer, in every time and place until the end, while growing in the three theological virtues, which sum up her entire life: faith, hope, and love.

On this occasion, we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit to the apostles and to the Church in the Cenacle as a historical and salvific event which accomplishes the promise of the Lord Jesus and fulfills the prophecies of the old prophets. The promise was fulfilled in the last supper, according to the Gospel of John, when Jesus promised the apostles to ask the Father to give them the Paraclete, the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it cannot see him or know him, but they know him because he resides in them and is in them.

As we reflect on the farewell speech, the evangelist explains the role of the Holy Spirit in five words that begin with the phrase "and when the Paraclete comes..." The first three words are: "the Holy Spirit will teach you everything and will remind you of all that I told you". After Jesus speaks of the vine and the branches and invites us to abide in the vine and to give fruit, he goes back and says of the spirit: "when the Paraclete comes, the one that I will send you from my Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will be my witness, and you too will be my witnesses, for you have been with me since the beginning.

As for the fourth word on the role of the Holy Spirit, it is in John 16: 7-11, when Jesus says, "it is better for you if I go; if I do not, the Paraclete will not come. But if I go, I will send him to you, and when he comes, he will rebuke the world on its sin and convince it of the availability of righteousness and judgment." The Lord explains to the disciples : "The world's sin is unbelief in me; there is righteousness available because I go to the Father and you shall see me no more; there is deliverance from judgment because the prince of this world has already been judged."

The fifth and last word is: "When the Holy Spirit, who is truth, comes, he shall guide you into all truth...He shall praise me and bring me great honor by showing you my glory".

Beloved, with these words Jesus turns to us to ask us about the role of the Spirit in our lives, we the spiritual and civil leaders, Christians in this world; do we witness to Christ in our lives, we who received the teaching of Christ? Is Jesus with us and in us? Do we always remember the presence of Jesus in us? And how we live this presence?

Today, the Spirit, through the words of Pope Francis, invites us to read the signs of time through the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: "Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ...I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. What I would like to propose is something much more in the line of an evangelical discernment. It is the approach of a missionary disciple, an approach "nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit

With the Holy Spirit, Mary is always present among the people. She was with the disciples to intercede before him, thus enabling the apostolic explosion on the day of Pentecost. She is the mother of the missionary Church, and without her, we cannot entirely come to grips with the new evangelization.

With her, we conclude our prayer saying, "Oh you Star of evangelization, help us to radiate the testimony of the communion, service, generous faith, justice, and love of the poor, so that the joy of the Gospel would reach the four corners of the world! Oh mother of the living Gospel, Oh source of joy to the young, pray for us! Amen. Hallelujah!!!

El HageMoussa

Maronite Archbishop of Haïfa and the Holy Land