

Come, Holy Spirit! This brief, impassioned prayer claims a venerable place in our Christian tradition, as it forms the basis of a most sacred hymn, composed over a millennium ago, and prayed devoutly at countless Pentecost liturgies and Red Masses and ordinations and Church councils throughout the centuries. Come, Holy Spirit! This prayer has been a favorite among the Congregation of Holy Cross in America, perhaps because we're often priests and brothers on the go, running from one appointment to the next, and these three words of loving desperation are all we had time to offer. Come, Holy Spirit! This prayer is short, but mighty, because it implores God to be truly present among us, for the Spirit to come in that mysterious paradox of peace and power, both to comfort us in our troubles and to awaken us from our stupor. Come, Holy Spirit! It is most fitting that, at the beginning of a new academic year, we as a Catholic University utter this prayer from our heart. Because a University, as the very name intimates, is literally that which is turned into one, and the power of the Spirit is the power to bring unity. And today our Scriptures can enlighten us on the gifts of divine unity to the very real human conditions of our life on the Bluff.

We hear of that first Pentecost, recounted in the Acts of the Apostles, just 50 days after Easter, the origin story of the Church. Like every origin story, it is meant to reveal to us the essence, the meaning, the fundamental nature of what is born this day. So, we ask, as the Spirit pours down on the Apostles and Mary and all those gathered in one place, as the Spirit gives birth to the Church, what is the essence, the primary gift bestowed? The gift of unity in diversity. This enormous crowd, visiting Jerusalem from so many nations on earth, all receive one message: the proclamation by these Galilean disciples of the mighty acts of God, the Good News of liberation and salvation accomplished by the life, the death, and the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ. And yet, these pilgrims all hear this single and singular proclamation clearly in their own particular languages. The Spirit calls them to join one community, to embrace one Truth, and yet this call to unity does not impose on them a uniformity, does not erase or deny their identities or their cultures. The Truth is not divided, with one individual or one group's truth against another's, but the one Truth needs a multiplicity of truly different voices to be authentically proclaimed, and a multiplicity of ears and hearts to be authentically received.

In our own UP community, we have been striving to embody this Christian essence: to incorporate more voices, to lift up peoples of different backgrounds and languages and cultures. And as a university, we do well to remember that each of our different disciplines also is called to lend its unique voice to profess the Truth. We can understand what it means for our Theology Department to declare "the mighty acts of God." But can we also envision how the rest of our academic community might, in ways that are authentic to each individual language, hear and receive and proclaim Good News?

For nearly two millennia, Christianity has affirmed the inherent goodness and intelligibility of the Created world and the rationality of the human observer. Christianity has upheld the dignity of each human being as a fundamental unity of body of soul, a creature worthy of the Incarnation, a creature with an eternal destiny. Christianity has told its story and professed God's glory, not only in liturgy and theology, but also in philosophy and literature, in mosaic and painting, in poetry and music, in sculpture and architecture. Christianity has instructed leaders and governments and whole societies in their responsibility, in their vocation, to establish real justice in laws and structures that nurture human flourishing and anticipate the Kingdom of God. Now I don't mean to suggest that, for all our history, the Church has embodied all these values and principles without failure or even sinfulness. But countless men and women, priest and religious and lay alike, even believers and unbelievers alike, have found, in this particularly Christian understanding of reality, their inspiration to make fundamental contributions to the physical sciences; to medicine and medical practice; to law and the theory of human rights; to the fine arts; to politics, economics, and industry. All of them engaged this great Tradition in mind, heart, soul, and body, and, in the languages authentic to their disciplines, heard and sought and proclaimed the Truth, the Good News. All of us at this Catholic University, whether student or faculty, staff or administration, have the call to do likewise.

Now this is not just some idealistic, theoretical, or historical vision. This is a matter of present, significant, real-world urgency. When we consider the greater society, and when we look out upon our own city of Portland, we can see tremendous division, confusion, and brokenness. Today I'm inviting us to envision a community on the Bluff of unity in diversity; a community that believes in, searches for, and professes the Truth in a chorus of unique and valued voices; a community that embodies the Truth in loving action – this is a community whose witness and service would be a beacon and a blessing. May God continue to form us into this community. Come, Holy Spirit!