

St. Leo the Great - Sermon 75

I. The giving of the Law by Moses prepared the way for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost

The hearts of all [Catholics](#), beloved, realize that today's [solemnity](#) is to be honored as one of the chief feasts, nor is there any [doubt](#) that great respect is due to this day, which the [Holy Spirit](#) has hallowed by the [miracle](#) of His most excellent gift. For from the day on which the Lord ascended up above all heavenly heights to sit down at God the Father's right hand, this is the tenth which has shone, and the fiftieth from His Resurrection, being the very day on which it began, and containing in itself great revelations of [mysteries](#) both new and old, by which it is most manifestly revealed that Grace was fore-announced through the Law and the Law fulfilled through Grace. For as of old, when the Hebrew nation were released from the Egyptians, on the fiftieth day after the [sacrificing](#) of the lamb the Law was given on Mount Sinai, so after the suffering of [Christ](#), wherein the [true](#) Lamb of God was slain, on the fiftieth day from His Resurrection, the [Holy Ghost](#) came down upon the Apostles and the multitude of [believers](#), so that the earnest [Christian](#) may easily perceive that the beginnings of the [Old Testament](#) were preparatory to the beginnings of the [Gospel](#), and that the second covenant was founded by the same Spirit that had instituted the first.

II. How marvellous was the gift of "divers tongues."

For as the Apostles' story testifies: "while the days of Pentecost were fulfilled and all the [disciples](#) were together in the same place, there occurred suddenly from heaven a sound as of a violent wind coming, and filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them divided tongues as of fire and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the [Holy Spirit](#), and began to speak with other tongues, as the [Holy Spirit](#) gave them utterance [Acts 2:1-4](#) ." Oh! how swift are the words of wisdom, and where God is the Master, how quickly is what is taught, learned. No interpretation is required for understanding, no practice for using, no time for studying, but the Spirit of Truth blowing where He wills, the languages peculiar to each nation become common property in the mouth of the [Church](#). And therefore from that day the trumpet of the [Gospel](#)-preaching has sounded loud: from that day the showers of gracious gifts, the rivers of blessings, have watered every desert and all the dry land, since to renew the face of the earth the [Spirit of God](#) "moved over the waters," and to drive away the old darkness flashes of new light shone forth, when by the blaze of those busy tongues was kindled the Lord's bright Word and fervent eloquence, in which to arouse the understanding, and to consume [sin](#) there lay both a capacity of enlightenment and a power of burning.

III. The three Persons in the Trinity are perfectly equal in all things

But although, dearly-beloved, the actual form of the thing done was exceeding wonderful, and undoubtedly in that exultant chorus of all [human](#) languages the Majesty of the [Holy Spirit](#) was present, yet no one must think that His Divine substance appeared in what was seen with bodily eyes. For His Nature, which is invisible and shared in common with the Father and the [Son](#), showed the character of His gift and work by the outward sign that pleased Him, but kept His essential property within His own Godhead: because [human](#) sight can no more perceive the [Holy Ghost](#) than it can the Father or the Son. For in the Divine Trinity nothing is unlike or unequal, and all that

can be thought concerning Its substance admits of no diversity either in power or [glory](#) or [eternity](#). And while in the property of each Person the Father is one, the Son is another, and the [Holy Ghost](#) is another, yet the Godhead is not distinct and different; for while the Son is the Only begotten of the [Father](#), the [Holy Spirit](#) is the Spirit of the Father and the [Son](#), not in the way that every creature is the creature of the Father and the [Son](#), but as living and having power with Both, and [eternally](#) subsisting of That Which is the Father and the Son . And hence when the Lord before the day of His Passion promised the coming of the [Holy Spirit](#) to His [disciples](#), He said, “I have yet many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of Truth shall have come, He shall guide you into all the Truth. For He shall not speak from Himself, but whatsoever He shall have heard, He shall speak and shall announce things to come unto you. All things that the Father has are Mine: therefore said I that He shall take of Mine, and shall announce it to you [John 16:12-15](#) .” Accordingly, there are not some things that are the Father's, and other the Son's, and other the [Holy Spirit's](#): but all things whatsoever the Father has, the Son also has, and the [Holy Spirit](#) also has: nor was there ever a time when this communion did not exist, because with Them to have all things is to always exist. In them let no times, no grades, no differences be imagined , and, if no one can explain that which is [true](#) concerning [God](#), let no one dare to assert what is not [true](#). For it is more excusable not to make a full statement concerning His ineffable Nature than to frame an actually wrong definition. And so whatever loyal hearts can conceive of the Father's [eternal](#) and unchangeable Glory, let them at the same time understand it of the Son and of the [Holy Ghost](#) without any separation or difference. For we confess this blessed Trinity to be One God for this reason, because in these three Persons there is no diversity either of substance, or of power, or of will, or of operation.

IV. The Macedonian heresy is as blasphemous as the Arian

As therefore we abhor the [Arians](#), who maintain a difference between the Father and the [Son](#), so also we abhor the Macedonians , who, although they ascribe equality to the Father and the [Son](#), yet think the [Holy Ghost](#) to be of a lower nature, not considering that they thus fall into that [blasphemy](#), which is not to be forgiven either in the present age or in the judgment to come, as the Lord says: “whosoever shall have spoken a word against the [Son of Man](#), it shall be forgiven him, but he that shall have spoken against the [Holy Ghost](#), it shall not be forgiven him either in this age or in the age to come [Matthew 12:32](#) .” And so to persist in this impiety is unpardonable, because it cuts him off from Him, by Whom he could confess: nor will he ever attain to healing pardon, who has no Advocate to plead for him. For from Him comes the invocation of the [Father](#), from Him come the tears of penitents, from Him come the groans of suppliants, and “no one can call Jesus the Lord save in the [Holy Ghost 1 Corinthians 12:3-6](#),” Whose Omnipotence as equal and Whose Godhead as one, with the Father and the [Son](#), the Apostle most clearly proclaims, saying, “there are divisions of graces but the same Spirit; and the divisions of ministrations but the same Lord; and there are divisions of operations but the same [God](#), Who works all things in all [1 Corinthians 12:3-6](#) .”

V. The Spirit's work is still continued in the Church

By these and other numberless [proofs](#), dearly-beloved, with which the authority of the Divine utterances is ablaze, let us with one mind be incited to pay reverence to Whitsuntide, exulting in [honour](#) of the [Holy Ghost](#), through Whom the whole catholic

Church is sanctified, and every rational [soul](#) quickened; Who is the Inspirer of the Faith, the Teacher of Knowledge, the Fount of Love, the Seal of Chastity, and the Cause of all Power. Let the minds of the faithful [rejoice](#), that throughout the world One [God](#), Father, Son, and [Holy Ghost](#), is praised by the confession of all tongues, and that that sign of His Presence, which appeared in the likeness of fire, is still perpetuated in His work and gift. For the Spirit of Truth Himself makes the house of His [glory](#) shine with the brightness of His light, and will have nothing dark nor lukewarm in His temple. And it is through His aid and teaching also that the purification of [fasts](#) and [alms](#) has been established among us. For this venerable day is followed by a most wholesome practice, which all the [saints](#) have ever found most profitable to them, and to the diligent observance of which we exhort you with a shepherd's care, to the end that if any blemish has been contracted in the days just passed through heedless negligence, it may be atoned for by the discipline of [fasting](#) and corrected by [pious](#) devotion. On Wednesday and Friday, therefore, let us fast, and on Saturday for this very purpose keep vigil with accustomed devotion, through [Jesus Christ](#) our Lord, Who with the Father and the [Holy Ghost](#) lives and reigns for ever and ever. [Amen](#).

About this page

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Sermon 77

(On Whitsuntide, III.)

I. The Holy Ghost's work did not begin at Pentecost, but was continued because the Holy Trinity is One in action and in will

Today's festival, dearly-beloved, which is held in reverence by the whole world, has been hallowed by that advent of the [Holy Ghost](#), which on the fiftieth day after the Lord's Resurrection, descended on the Apostles and the multitude of [believers](#), even as it was hoped. And there was this hope, because the Lord Jesus had promised that He should come, not then first to be the Indweller of the [saints](#), but to kindle to a greater heat, and to fill with larger abundance the hearts that were dedicated to Him, increasing, not commencing His gifts, not fresh in operation because richer in bounty. For the Majesty of the [Holy Ghost](#) is never separate from the Omnipotence of the Father and the [Son](#), and whatever the Divine government accomplishes in the ordering of all things, proceeds from the Providence of the whole Trinity. Therein exists unity of mercy and loving-kindness, unity of judgment and [justice](#): nor is there any division in action where there is no divergence of will. What, therefore, the Father enlightens, the Son enlightens, and the [Holy Ghost](#) enlightens: and while there is one Person of the Sent,

another of the Sender, and another of the Promiser, both the Unity and the Trinity are at the same time revealed to us, so that the Essence which possesses equality and does not admit of solitariness is understood to belong to the same Substance but not the same Person.

II. Each Person in the Trinity took part in our Redemption

The fact, therefore, that, with the co-operation of the inseparable Godhead still perfect, certain things are performed by the [Father](#), certain by the [Son](#), and certain by the [Holy Spirit](#), in particular belongs to the ordering of our Redemption and the method of our [salvation](#). For if man, made after the image and likeness of [God](#), had retained the dignity of his own nature, and had not been deceived by the [devil's](#) wiles into transgressing through [lust](#) the law laid down for him, the Creator of the world would not have become a Creature, the Eternal would not have entered the sphere of time, nor God the [Son](#), Who is equal with [God](#) the [Father](#), have assumed the form of a slave and the likeness of sinful flesh. But because “by the [devil's malice](#) death entered into the world [Wisdom 2:24](#),” and captive humanity could not otherwise be set free without His undertaking our [cause](#), Who without loss of His majesty should both become [true](#) Man, and alone have no taint of [sin](#), the mercy of the Trinity divided for Itself the work of our restoration in such a way that the Father should be propitiated, the Son should propitiate, and the [Holy Ghost](#) enkindle. For it was necessary that those who are to be saved should also do something on their part, and by the turning of their hearts to the Redeemer should quit the dominion of the enemy, even as the Apostle says, “[God](#) sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father [Galatians 4:6](#),” “And where the [Spirit of the Lord](#) is, there is liberty [2 Corinthians 3:17](#),” and “no one can call Jesus Lord except in the [Holy Spirit 1 Corinthians 12:3](#) .”

III. But this apportionment of functions does not mar the Unity of the Trinity

If, therefore, under guiding [grace](#), dearly-beloved, we faithfully and wisely understand what is the particular work of the [Father](#), of the [Son](#), and of the [Holy Ghost](#), and what is common to the Three in our restoration, we shall without [doubt](#) so accept what has been wrought for us by humiliation and in the body as to think nothing unworthy about the One and Selfsame Glory of the Trinity. For although no mind is competent to think, no tongue to speak about [God](#), yet whatever that is which the [human intellect](#) apprehends about the [essence](#) of the Father's Godhead, unless one and the selfsame [truth](#) is held concerning His Only-begotten or the [Holy Spirit](#), our meditations are disloyal, and beclouded by the intrusions of the flesh, and even that is lost, which seemed a right conclusion concerning the [Father](#), because the whole Trinity is forsaken, if the Unity therein is not maintained; and That Which is different by any inequality can in no [true](#) sense be One.

IV. In thinking upon God, we must put aside all material notions

When, therefore, we fix our minds on confessing the Father and the Son and the [Holy Ghost](#), let us keep far from our thoughts the forms of things visible, the ages of beings born in time, and all material bodies and places. Let that which is extended in space, that which is enclosed by limit, and whatever is not always everywhere and entire be banished from the heart. The conception of the Triune Godhead must put aside the idea of interval or of grade, and if a man has attained any worthy thought of [God](#), let him not dare to withhold it from any Person therein, as if to ascribe with more [honour](#) to the Father that which he does not ascribe to the Son and Spirit. It is not [true](#) Godliness to

put the Father before the Only-begotten: insult to the Son is insult to the Father: what is detracted from the One is detracted from Both. For since Their Eternity and Godhead are alike common, the Father is not accounted either Almighty and Unchangeable, if He begot One less than Himself or gained by having One Whom before He had not .

V. Christ as Man is less than the Father, as God co-equal

The Lord Jesus does, indeed, say to His [disciples](#), as was read in the [Gospel](#) lection, “if you loved Me, you would assuredly [rejoice](#), because I go to the [Father](#), because the Father is greater than I ;” but those ears, which have often heard the words, “I and the Father are One ,” and “He that sees Me, sees the Father also ,” accept the saying without supposing a difference of Godhead or understanding it of that Essence which they [know](#) to be co-[eternal](#) and of the same nature with the Father. Man's uplifting, therefore, in the Incarnation of the Word, is commended to the [holy](#) Apostles also, and they, who were distressed at the announcement of the Lord's departure from them, are incited to [eternal joy](#) over the increase in their dignity; “If you loved Me,” He says, “ye would assuredly [rejoice](#), because I go to the Father:” that is, if, with complete [knowledge](#) ye saw what [glory](#) is bestowed on you by the fact that, being begotten of [God](#) the [Father](#), I have been born of a [human](#) mother also, that being invisible I have made Myself visible, that being [eternal](#) “in the form of God” I accepted the “form of a slave,” “ye would [rejoice](#) because I go to the Father.” For to you is offered this ascension, and your humility is in Me raised to a place above all heavens at the Father's right hand. But I, Who am with the Father that which the Father is, abide undivided with My Father, and in coming from Him to you I do not leave Him, even as in returning to Him from you I do not forsake you. Rejoice, therefore, “because I go to the [Father](#), because the Father is greater than I.” For I have united you with Myself, and am become [Son of Man](#) that you might have power to be sons of [God](#). And hence, though I am One in both forms, yet in that whereby I am conformed to you I am less than the [Father](#), whereas in that whereby I am not divided from the Father I am greater even than Myself. And so let the Nature, which is less than the [Father](#), go to the [Father](#), that the Flesh may be where the Word always is, and that the one Faith of the catholic Church may [believe](#) that He Whom as Man it does not deny to be less, is equal as God with the Father.

VI. And this equality which the Son has with the Father, the Holy Ghost also has Accordingly, dearly-beloved, let us despise the vain and blind cunning of ungodly [heretics](#), which flatters itself over its crooked interpretation of this sentence, and when the Lord says, “All things that the Father has are Mine [John 16:15](#),” does not understand that it takes away from the Father whatever it dares to deny to the [Son](#), and is so foolish in matters even which are [human](#) as to think, that what is His Father's has ceased to belong to His Only-begotten, because He has taken on Him what is ours. Mercy in the case of God does not lessen power, nor is the reconciliation of the creature whom He loves a falling off of Eternal [glory](#). What the Father has the Son also has, and what the Father and the Son have, the [Holy Ghost](#) also has, because the whole Trinity together is One God. But this Faith is not the discovery of earthly wisdom nor the conviction of [man's](#) opinion: the Only-begotten Son has taught it Himself, and the [Holy Ghost](#) has established it Himself, concerning Whom no other conception must be formed than is formed concerning the Father and the Son. Because albeit He is not the Father nor the [Son](#), yet He is not separable from the Father and the Son: and as He has His own personality in the Trinity, so has He One substance in Godhead with the Father

and the [Son](#), filling all things, containing all things, and with the Father and the Son controlling all things, to Whom is the [honour](#) and [glory](#) for ever and ever. [Amen](#).

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