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Faithful invited to pray Novena to the Holy Spirit

By Brian T. Olszewski, The Catholic Virginian / May 11, 2021



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Along with Catholics and Pentecostals worldwide, Catholics in the Diocese of Richmond are invited to pray an Ecumenical Novena to the Holy Spirit for what Msgr. Joseph Lehman III, diocesan officer of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, called “a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit on our world.”

The novena, which begins Ascension Thursday, May 13 and ends Pentecost Eve, Saturday, May 22, marks the 120th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII invoking the Holy Spirit upon the world on Dec. 31, 1900. This prayer led to the birth of the Pentecostal tradition and eventually the ecumenical movement. The pope had actually asked the Church’s bishops in 1897 to pray a novena for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but few did.

The practice of praying a novena dates to the time between the apostles witnessing the Lord’s Ascension and their awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Msgr. Lehman, pastor of St. Bede, Williamsburg, noted that most Catholics are familiar with novenas, e.g., to St. Joseph, St. Jude and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but that this one is unlike those.

“What is different is the joint nature about this particular novena with people who understand and have experience with the Holy Spirit,” he said of the participation by Catholics and Pentecostals.

The timing of the novena is excellent, according to the priest.

The awakening of the domestic Church is right in line with what our bishop is calling us to do,” he said. “It is one of the fruits of the New Evangelization. Everything is flowing into and crisscrossing at this particular time. That can only be the result of the work of the Holy Spirit working.”

Quoting from an interview Dr. Mary Healy, professor of Scripture at Sacred Heart Seminary, Detroit, Msgr. Lehman said, “This is a really good year for the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the divisions that are tearing us apart. Human solutions are not going to overcome these problems. Only the Holy Spirit can change the human heart.”

He added, “We are coming together with other believers to pray for a common cause,” he said. “The readings (at Mass during this season) are lending themselves for us to think about doing some of this.”

Deacon Darrell Wentworth, executive producer at CMax.TV, began working with charismatics and Pentecostals in 1998. He was ordained a deacon for the Diocese of Richmond in 2003 and serves at St. Gregory the Great, Virginia Beach.

He described a deacon as a “bridge between the Church and the culture.”

“We focus on faith in Christ Jesus and we move from relational ecumenism to relational evangelization for the culture,” Deacon Wentworth said. “The deacon says (at the end of Mass), ‘Go and proclaim the Gospel of the Lord’ and leads the laity into the culture.”

He described the novena as a “Pentecost experience.”

“We want to transfigure the culture, not transform it,” he said. “We want the culture to see what God has already designed it to be.”

Deacon Wentworth noted that there is an identity crisis in the world, but that there shouldn’t be.

“We find our true identity in Christ,” he said. “Evangelization is the process of discovering your identity in Christ and then helping others find their identity in him as well.”

Highlighting the importance of the Ecumenical Novena to the Holy Spirit, Deacon Wentworth said, “The ultimate goal is to develop loving relationships between all Spirit-led Christians that will lead to neighborhood-based ecumenical communities that will transfigure the culture. That has been the goal of the last three popes.”