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Pentecost marks 'life-changing power of God's presence,' cardinal says

by Carol Zimmermann by Catholic News Service

Washington — The church's celebration of Pentecost highlights the "life-changing power of God's presence" believers receive through the Holy Spirit, said Washington Cardinal Donald Wuerl.

Although the feast, celebrated June 8, doesn't look as it did in the apostles' time -- with the roar of wind and tongues of fire -- the cardinal said it serves as a reminder of the outpouring of God's spirit long ago and continuously.

"The Holy Spirit comes regularly" and is "active in the church today," he said.

In an interview Tuesday with Catholic News Service, the cardinal discussed the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit -- wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord -- which have been the focus of recent audience talks by Pope Francis.

The cardinal said these gifts, outlined by the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, are "manifestations of the presence of God's spirit in our lives."

Simply put, he said they are meant to "help us through each day ... to draw closer to the Lord."

"As the church prepares to celebrate Pentecost, we recognize that we have these gifts," he added.

He described the gift of wisdom as "seeing things through the eyes of God."

"Wisdom is usually associated with the elderly -- with the seniors -- people who have lived through life and experienced not only facts but how they come together and relate us to God."

Knowledge, he said, is "being able with our mind to grasp and hold what God says to us through revelation in the word of God."

He noted that believers hear the word of God not just with their ears but their hearts.

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"That's why prayer is such an important part of the Christian experience of the Holy Spirit," he said, noting the significance of spending quiet time prayerfully reading Scripture and "letting God's spirit fill us with the meaning of those words."

He said counsel, another gift, helps believers "find our way through situations."

"It is the quiet voice of the spirit speaking to us to say: "This is what you should be doing; this is the better way to act; this is the right way."

In his May 7 audience talk, Pope Francis similarly noted that counsel comes through prayer.

"We have to give room to the Holy Spirit so that he can counsel us. And giving him room means praying, praying that he come and always help us."

"Prayer is very important," he said, and "never forget to pray, never!"

The pope stressed that prayer can take place anywhere because "nobody can tell when we are praying on the bus, on the road, we pray in silence, with the heart."

He also urged the crowd not to just recite prayers they know from childhood but to use their own words to ask for specific direction and guidance.

Wuerl said he tells young people at confirmation: "The church is going to give you everything you'll ever need to make your way through life staying close to God. You have to use the gifts."

And this message is not just for youths.

The cardinal pointed out that the church today is in a "moment of a new Pentecost."

"We need to present our faith in a way that's fresh and new; that's what new Pentecost is all about."

He said the local and universal church is tapping into gifts of the Holy Spirit through special gatherings or synods. For the past two years, the Washington archdiocese prepared for and held a synod; the final session will be this Pentecost. The synod has been evaluating where various ministries of have been successful and where more work is needed as the archdiocese celebrates its 75th anniversary.

He said the local synod, much like the Oct. 5-19 extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the family at the Vatican, has involved a process of prayer, reflection and listening.

He said the impetus behind the archdiocesan synod process has been to determine "if we really are being

the best church we are supposed to be."

The synod on the family, similarly, is a way for the church to understand how people are living the faith which in turn, he said, should "bring about a new commitment to live it."

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