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**Boston Catholic Men's Conference**  
**April 19, 2008**  
**Summary and Application of Pope Benedict's Homily at Nationals Stadium**

- I. St. James
  - A. He urges us to be “doers of the word,” not just “idle listeners who deceive themselves.”
  - B. Jesus in the Gospel tells us that a wise man not only hears his words, but acts on them, seeing in them the very foundation for a structure that will remain standing when the rains and winds come to buffet one's spiritual house.
  - C. That's what we hope to do here, very briefly, to listen to the words Jesus Christ is addressing to us in the United States through his earthly vicar, confident, by Jesus' own words, that those of us who hear him hear the one who sent him.” “Those who hear you, hear me.”
- II. The central theme of Benedict's homily and the entire Mass in Washington is the real renewal of the Church in the United States.
  - A. Last Sunday, at his address in St. Peter's square two days before departing for our country, the Pope said that his hope was to bring about a “spiritual renewal for all Americans” through sharing the word of life given to us by Christ, our hope.
  - B. This renewal, he says, occurs in two main stages:
    1. Our own interior renewal to the Lord Jesus, individually and as a Church.
    2. Our becoming leaven, light and salt for our country, bringing about this renewal at large.
  - C. He says that this two-fold renewal will be done by the power of the Holy Spirit, if we let him. “Lord, send out your spirit and renew the face of the earth.”
- III. The Holy Father says that in us, now, the Holy Spirit wants to bring us to re-birth by bringing us back to the essential experience of the birth of the Church on Pentecost Sunday.
  - A. He says that looking back over the last 200 years of Catholicism in our country, tracing itself back to the splitting of Baltimore into four daughter dioceses (Boston, NY, Philadelphia and Bardstown), we can see that the “growth of faith in America is one chapter in the great story of the Church's growth coming from Pentecost.”
  - B. Just like in the early Church, when the first apostles and disciples needed to suffer so much and pass through the crucible of purification, so did the Catholics in the United States. Priests would be expelled and killed. Families were ostracized. Legislated discrimination, by the Know-nothings, is still on the books.
  - C. But this didn't stop us any more than it stopped the first wave of Pentecost. God helped us. And we built so many schools, hospitals, churches and did so much good.
  - D. But Benedict says, while thanking God and praising the accomplishments of past generations, we're called to look to the future, firmly grounded in the faith we have received, and confront the new challenges with the power of the same Holy Spirit.
- IV. To be capable of this new Pentecost, which will fill us with the Holy Spirit and spawn us toward others, has a couple of characteristics:
  - A. The first is unity
    1. The Holy Spirit wants to make us one body, one faith, one baptism.
      - a. The Holy Father is telling us between the lines that, for example, the new wave of immigrants are our brothers and sisters, not strangers.
      - b. He's telling us that division in our faith, at the level of teaching, is not of the good spirit.
      - c. We need to cultivate a mindset, an intellectual “culture” that is genuinely Catholic, confident in the profound harmony of faith and reason, and prepared to bring the richness of the vision of faith to bear on urgent issues affecting the future of American society.
  - B. The second is conversion
    1. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached conversion for the forgiveness of sins.
    2. In the new Pentecost, there must be this type of conversion leading toward forgiveness. We need the Lord's gift of repentance.
    3. The pope mentions in this context the conversion we need as a result of the sexual abuse of minors.
      - a. The Church in America has experienced much pain.
      - b. No words of mind would describe the pain and harm inflicted by such abuse.
      - c. Those who have suffered must be given loving pastoral attention.
      - d. It has caused great damage within the community of the Church.
      - e. Great efforts have already been made to deal honestly and fairly with this tragic situation, and to ensure that children — whom our Lord loves so deeply and who are our greatest treasure — can grow up

safely.

f. I encourage each of you to do what you can to foster healing and reconciliation, and to assist those who have been hurt.

4. But then he talks about sin in a larger context:

a. On Easter Sunday evening, Jesus celebrated the Eucharist with the disciples on the road to Emmaus and breathed the HS on the Apostles granting them the power to forgive sins.

b. Through God's power, entrusted to frail human ministers, Church is constantly reborn and each of us is given the hope of a new beginning.

c. We are called to trust in the Holy Spirit's power to inspire conversion, to heal every wound, to overcome every division, to inspire new life and freedom. We need these gifts and they are close at hand, particularly in the sacrament of Penance!

d. The liberating power of this sacrament, in which our honest confession of sin is met by God's merciful word of pardon and peace, needs to be rediscovered and re-appropriated by every Catholic.

e. To a great extent, *the renewal of the Church in America depends on the renewal of the practice of Penance and the growth in holiness which that sacrament both inspires and accomplishes*. (It is the way we enter into the victory of Christ, his resurrection over sin and death).

f. This renewal, of course, has a chance to begin in each of us today, as so many priests have come to offer the sacrament.

C. By the Church's focus on unity and reconciliation, we can lead the whole of society.

1. In every age and place, the Church is called to grow in unity through constant conversion to Christ.

2. This unity, in turn, gives rise to an unceasing missionary outreach by the power of the Holy Spirit to invite all people to enter the community of those saved by Christ's blood and living the new life of the Holy Spirit.

3. He wants his visit on this significant anniversary to "be an occasion for all Catholics to reaffirm their unity in the apostolic faith, to offer their contemporaries a convincing account of the hope which inspires them (cf. 1 Pet 3:15), and to be renewed in missionary zeal for the extension of God's Kingdom."

D. He leads us in prayer to the Holy Spirit for these gifts.

1. For this conversion to occur, we need the Spirit's gift of repentance and faith to bring the good news of reconciliation with God in Christ.

2. Above all, pray that the Holy Spirit will pour out his gifts upon the Church, the gifts that lead to conversion, forgiveness and growth in holiness.

3. The Holy Spirit inspires us to pray with "inexpressible groanings," with sighs too deep for words, for the fulfillment of God's promises. We enter into the prayer of Christ, weak and suffering, as he headed to victory on the Cross.

4. With this prayer, may the Church in America embrace ever more fully the way of conversion and fidelity to the demands of the Gospel — experiencing the consolation of hope and the Spirit's gifts of joy and strength.

V. Conclusion

A. As we thank God for the blessings of the past 200 years, B16 invites us, our families and every parish and religious community to trust in the power of grace to create a future of hope for God's people.

B. He asks us, in the name of the Lord Jesus, to set aside all division and to work with joy to prepare a way for him, in fidelity to his word and in constant conversion to his will.

C. Above all, he urges us to be a leaven of evangelical hope in American society, striving to bring the light and the truth of the Gospel to the task of building an ever-more just and free world for generations yet to come.

D. "Those who have hope must live different lives (SS 2). We are called to point the way to the hope which God is opening up to his Church and all humanity: a world reconciled and renewed in Christ our Savior.