

Homily - Holy Mary in the Cenacle
Santa Maria, RS, Brazil, September 11, 2025
Monsignor Melchor Sánchez
Acts 1:6–14; Lk 8:19–21

Most Reverend Excellency,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Dear Friends,

1. September 11 has remained in our memory linked to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in New York, when members of a terrorist group hijacked several airplanes and crashed them into the Twin Towers, causing a massacre of incalculable proportions. According to many experts, those events marked the end of a brief stage of détente after the Cold War and opened a new period marked by the violence of terrorism and the wars that followed. Today we remember all these innocent victims: firefighters, police officers, doctors, and also the terrorists themselves, whose souls had been poisoned by the hatred of the one who led them to that criminal action.

Today, however, we recall an explosion of a very different nature, a spiritual outburst, which took place in the Cenacle of Jerusalem on the feast of Pentecost, fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus. There, too, there was a strong wind, an explosion, and tongues of fire that rested upon those present. But this was not an explosion of death, but of life. The Acts of the Apostles describe what happened as follows:

“Suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house where they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them” (Acts 2:2–3).

This explosion took place in a house in Jerusalem, in the upper room where they used to stay (Acts 1:13). The room and the house were shaken at their very foundations, like Mount Sinai when the Lord manifested Himself to seal the covenant with the people and to give the Torah. But the explosion did not affect only the house; it also touched those present in the innermost depths of their being:

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim” (Acts 2:4).

2. Who were these people who were shaken and filled with the Holy Spirit? “Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All of them devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers” (Acts 1:13–14).

They are the Church. The Twelve Apostles (among whom Matthias is already included) are the patriarchs of the new Israel preparing to receive the gift of the Law — a law not written on tablets of stone, but with the finger of God, the Holy Spirit, upon their hearts, as the prophet had foretold. These Twelve Apostles are the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem, as the Book of Revelation tells us; and we, adds St. Paul, have been built upon the foundation of the apostles. Only if we are in communion with the apostles and their successors are we the Church and able to receive the Holy Spirit.

3. Alongside the Apostles there were also some women, the same who had followed Jesus in His public life and had remained faithful to Him until the end, at the foot of the Cross, the witnesses of the Resurrection. They are Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and others. But one stands out among them in a unique way: Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Mary had already been filled with the Holy Spirit from the moment of the Annunciation, as the Archangel Gabriel had said:

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Lk 1:35).

She allowed herself to be filled with the Holy Spirit when the Word entered the world. And now, as the Church — the Body of Christ — begins its life, Mary is there as well. She, who is full of the Holy Spirit, carries Him everywhere: to Elizabeth and her household in the Visitation, and now to the nascent Church. Mary herself is — as a theologian beautifully wrote — the Church in its origin, in its source (Kirche im Ursprung).

4. Mary holds a place of honor among the disciples, but not only because she is the Mother of the Word, for having given birth to the Savior — which is certainly a great dignity. As St. Augustine reminds us, Mary conceived Jesus first in faith and then in the flesh: “More blessed is she who bore Christ in her mind than she who bore Him in her body”; and it is greater to have conceived by faith than to have given birth in the flesh.

This is what Jesus means when His Mother, accompanied by members of His family — cousins or relatives whom the Gospel calls “brothers” —, came to see Him:

“Someone told Him: ‘Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see You.’ He replied: ‘My mother and My brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it’” (Lk 8:20–21).

Jesus reaffirms the greatness of His Mother: She is truly Mother because she listened to the Word of God and put it into practice. And St. Augustine says therefore: “Undoubtedly, Holy Mary did the will of the Father; and for this reason, it is greater for Mary to have been a disciple of Christ than to have been the mother of Christ.”

Similarly, to a woman in the crowd who, upon seeing Jesus — who must have been striking in appearance — directed a compliment to His Mother, saying:

“Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts that nursed You.”

To which He replied:

“Rather, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it” (Lk 11:27–28).

5. These days, we have been recalling the figure of the Venerable João Luiz Pozzobon. One cannot help but be astonished at his works, which, expressed in numbers, are truly remarkable: houses, journeys, kilometers covered.

But Pozzobon is great not because he accomplished many things, but because he listened to the Word of God and put it into practice, thus becoming Mother and brother of Jesus. He received the Word of God, conceived it, made it flesh in his life, and brought it forth generously, tirelessly.

Mary calls herself the “humble handmaid of the Lord.” Pozzobon humbly considered himself the little donkey of the Pilgrim Mother. Let us also become Mary’s little donkeys, to carry her grace and her light to all