

My brothers and sisters, welcome to San Antonio! We are celebrating 300 years as a city, and we are so honored that you are here. “Unity Explosion,” wow! That sounds so full of enthusiasm and energy! I like it! I hope and pray that these days together will become an explosion of Christ’s love that will go forth, far and wide, from this place! I am so grateful that you have come to be with us at this special time.

We have been reading from St. Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy for several days now. It is worth our while to recall that St. Paul was in prison at the time he wrote this letter. He is being held in chains, in very unpleasant conditions, and he has already endured beatings, being stoned, and publicly denounced many times. But he tells us first that he is unashamed of the gospel, and that while he is personally in chains, the Word of God can never be chained! St. Paul has reached a point in his life where he cares not for himself, or his own comfort, or whether he is even accepted by others. He will testify to the truth of Jesus Christ, no matter what! And he is encouraging young Timothy to have a similar courage and determination in his life.

While St. Paul was writing to a personal friend and disciple, his message is a message that echos for all the church. St. Paul wants us all to have the audacity to live and proclaim the meaning of Jesus’ command to love God and to love our neighbor, as we heard in today’s gospel passage from St. Mark. And it does take audacity in our time to live these commandments! We are in a moment of history that does not honor God — not truly, and a time when selfishness

instead of love of neighbor is upheld as a virtue! Its going to take an explosion of love and unity to make an impact on our world, and our gathering together today is a good way to begin!

At his general audience yesterday, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, reminded us that as Christians we are “called to be gifts for others.” And we can be gifts for others when we share our love for God, and a genuine love of our neighbor. But this kind of love is not a love carried merely by words, though words are important. No, this love is known and conveyed primarily by our deeds. And it means recognizing who our neighbor is. Our neighbor is sometimes the one its hard to be around! He or she is the person its hard to listen to! The one we often disagree with. He or she might not speak English well, or understand what being a Catholic is all about. Our neighbor might not be here with a legal status. Our neighbor might not share our moral values.

If we follow the spirit of this world, as it is right now, we would just shun our neighbor, close ourselves off from him, or even reject her. But our spirit is not the spirit of this world! Our spirit is the Holy Spirit! And the Holy Spirit is like a mighty wind, or like tongues of fire, or like a great roaring sound that impels us to go forth and proclaim a new way of life! It is an explosion! Not a dangerous explosion, but an explosion of love, of hope, of freedom, of renewal. An explosion so brilliant with love that we cry out, “Lord, send out your Spirit, and you shall renew the face of the earth!” This is the Spirit who unites us, who makes us one! This is the Spirit that turns strangers, even enemies, into friends and neighbors!

We can't have a unity explosion without the Holy Spirit! It can't be done without the Holy Spirit! If it could, humanity would have done it a long time ago! We need the Holy Spirit so that we can be gifts to others, as the Holy Father has reminded us to be. In these days together, let us welcome the Holy Spirit into our hearts so that, in turn, we will be part of the explosion of unity and love in Christ!