

31 Pentecost Sunday

Year A

June 4, 2017

Acts 2:1-11 Psalm 104 1Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13

John 20:19-23

Today is the Feast of Pentecost, which recalls for us the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles in the form of a roaring wind and tongues of fire. It also marks the conclusion of the fifty days of the Easter season and the birth and mission of the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the First Reading today from the Acts of the Apostles, Luke gives his account of Pentecost. Following the Ascension of Jesus, the Apostles, “together with some women, and Mary, the mother of Jesus,” gather in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. Nine days later the Holy Spirit, like a roaring wind, enters the Upper Room and descends with tongues of fire on the heads of the Apostles, as new life is breathed into this faint-hearted band.

The change in the Apostles is now startling as the Holy Spirit sends them to the market place to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and to go forth and baptize people. They throw aside caution and are no longer afraid. They are excited to begin their mission of the Church, proclaiming their faith in their crucified Master. They become *alive with the Holy Spirit*. Speaking in “many languages,” they preach about all God has accomplished. What happened on that day was the turning point in each of their lives and in the life of the newly founded Church itself.

Pentecost concludes the mission of the Son of God upon this earth in His humanity, but it marks the beginning of the life and mission of Christ in His Catholic Church. The Church is Christ’s Body, His mystical Body, filled with the life of His Spirit. This Spirit is the *soul* of the Church. Through His Spirit, which fills the whole Church with life, love and truth, Christ is faithful to His promise, “Know that I am with you *always* until the end of the world.”

After Pentecost, the good news of salvation, of God’s saving and healing love made manifest in Christ, was preached and radiated out to all the world from Jerusalem by the power of the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus foretold. For over 2,000 years, the Good News of God’s salvation has continued to radiate down through the ages to our own day today.

During the Easter season, we were blessed to hear readings from the Acts of the Apostles. We read how the Holy Spirit guided and empowered the mission of the Church to “renew the face of the earth.” The Holy Spirit guides us to the truth still today so we may live as more faithful disciples of Jesus. The coming of the Spirit on that first day of Pentecost was not a once and for all event, but rather, it was the beginning of the Holy Spirit’s permanent presence in our Church.

Like the Apostles, each of us will experience “Pentecost” moments as well, those times when we know the Holy Spirit is with us, in us, and through us, when we become alive with the Spirit of God penetrating our very being.

These moments begin when we first of all receive the Holy Spirit at our Baptism. The baptized person receives the Holy Spirit when the priest says, “Send your Holy Spirit to dwell within him or her.” By receiving the Holy Spirit, God wants to give us the grace to *understand* His will, to *choose* His will, and to *do* His will.

As a baptized person grows older, the Sacrament of Confirmation completes the Baptism. The Bishop or priest prays and imposes hands over the person and anoints the baptized person with chrism oil on the forehead in the form of a cross, and says, “Be sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.” We are sealed with these seven gifts of the Holy Spirit at our Confirmation: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. Life is what the Spirit has given to the Church, and through Baptism and Confirmation, this same gift is given to all of us who believe.

In the today’s Gospel, we find the Holy Spirit continuing to be active in the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession. After Jesus rises from the dead, He breathes on the Apostles and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” Through Christ, in unity with the Holy Spirit, our sins are forgiven.

Each time we celebrate our Sunday Liturgy, the priest calls upon the Holy Spirit to bless the gifts of bread and wine, so that they will become the Body and Blood of Christ. What a gift it is to have the opportunity to partake of the Body of

Christ daily to nourish us and sustain us. Jesus is truly with us until the end of time. After the memorial offering, the priest says to the Father, “Grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of Your Son and filled with His Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.”

The unity of the Church through the Holy Eucharist is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who brings the faithful into communion with Christ to form His Body, the Catholic Church. Christ fills the members of our community with the Holy Spirit and builds them, *animates them, and sends them out* to share the Good News with the world. How blest we are that this happens to us.

The Holy Spirit warms our hearts and leads us all to Christ. Whoever truly loves their neighbour gives evidence that the Spirit of God is at work in them. Wherever justice, peace and charity prevail, there we are seeing the Holy Spirit at work. When we pray, when we read the Scriptures, when we do good works, the Holy Spirit is working in us by guiding, enlightening, sanctifying, empowering and inspiring us in the ways of God. Through the Holy Spirit, our prayer becomes a “communion of love with the Father, not only through Christ, but also in Him” (CCC 2615).

The Holy Spirit breathes life into us that empowers us to be right with God, with one’s true self, and with others. The Holy Spirit breathes in us “Abba Father,” making us His children. As children of God, we commit ourselves to people living, no longer in the flesh, but in the Holy Spirit. May we always be open and receptive to the Holy Spirit in our lives and live according to the teachings given to us by Jesus Christ.

On this special feast day of Pentecost, let us thank God for the gifts of the Holy Spirit that work in countless hidden ways to *deepen our faith, fill us with strength and inspiration, and renew our lives*. Today, we pray this prayer with believers in our Catholic Church all through the world, “*Come, Holy Spirit, come into our hearts, come into our parish, come into our homes, come into our communities, and renew the face of the earth with Your love and peace.*”