

SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST



THE MASS

INTRODUCTION

- We have come to the second most important feast of the Liturgical Year: the Solemnity of Pentecost, which marks the end of Easter season. Easter and Pentecost are intimately connected.
- Originally this was a Jewish Feast, one of the three main festivals in the Jewish calendar. On this feast, the Jews praised God for:
 - THE COVENANT God had established with them on Mount Sinai;
 - the TEN COMMANDMENTS, which they called THE LAW; and
 - THE GRAIN HARVEST they had just completed.
- In His wisdom, God chose that very day to fulfill Jesus' promise of sending the Holy Spirit to the apostles. God chose that day to:
 - ratify THE NEW COVENANT, not just with one nation but with all mankind, a covenant we signed when we were baptized;
 - proclaim THE NEW LAW, consisting of a single command: to love one another the way Christ himself loved us; and
 - start A HARVEST OF SOULS with the three thousand persons who believed in Christ upon hearing Peter speak. That harvest has been going on ever since (we are part of it), and will go on for as long as there is a person yet to be saved.
- Today is our Pentecost. We have gathered here to gratefully receive the Spirit whom the Lord means to communicate to us in this Eucharist.

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

The Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world
and that which contains all things
understands what is said, alleluia.

COLLECT (OPENING PRAYER)

O God, who by the mystery of today's greatest feast sanctify your whole Church in every people and nation, pour out, we pray, the gifts of the Holy Spirit across the face of the earth and, with the divine grace that was at work when the Gospel was first proclaimed, fill now once more the hearts of believers. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. – Amen!

FIRST READING (*Acts 2:1-11*)

Introduction

- Luke opens Chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles with a detailed narration of the event we are celebrating today: the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and disciples gathered in the Upper Room.
- On Pentecost Day, the Holy Spirit worked on two fronts: carrying out an incredible change in the hearts of the apostles, and gathering the crowd around their house at the sound of the wind.
- In his narration, Luke mentions as many as fifteen different linguistic groups in the crowd; and though the apostles spoke Aramaic, each one present there heard them as if they were speaking in each one's mother tongue.
- The meaning of that miracle is that while sin had brought division among mankind, the Spirit brings, invariably, union and love.
- Pentecost marks the birthday of the Church, the feast of Unity. Let not dissension block the action of the Spirit in our community.

A proclamation from the Acts of the Apostles



¹ When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, the apostles and the disciples were all in one place together. ² And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. ³ Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. ⁶ At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard the apostles speaking in his own language. ⁷ They were astounded, and in amazement

they asked, “Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans?
⁸ Then how does each of us hear them in his own native language?
⁹ We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.”

The Word of the Lord!

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (*Ps 104:1.24, 29-30, 31.34*)

1. Bless the Lord, O my soul! // O Lord, my God, you are great indeed! // How manifold are your works, O Lord! // The earth is full of your creatures.
Response: Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth!
2. May the glory of the Lord endure forever; // may the Lord be glad in his works! // Pleasing to him be my theme; // I will be glad in the Lord. (**R.**)
3. If you take away their breath, they perish // and return to their dust. // When you send forth your spirit, they are created, // and you renew the face of the earth. (**R.**)

SECOND READING (*1 Cor 12:3-7.12-13*)

Introduction

- Time and again in his letters, Paul goes back to his choice comparison between the Church and the human body. The Spirit plays in the Church a role similar to that of the soul in the human body – with Him as the source of all activity in it, and the bond of union among Christians as the parts of that body.
- In today’s Second Reading, taken from his First Letter to the Christians of Corinth, Paul reminds us of a basic fact: that we would never have become members of that body had not the Spirit made us part of it. In other words, it was the Spirit who led us to faith in Christ.
- This is a unique privilege, indeed, but one that also implies a great responsibility: to foster unity within the community, whatever the cost.
- The Spirit pulls down all barriers that separate the various members of the Church. Let us be always on our guard lest we raise fresh barriers, thereby becoming guilty of going against the Spirit.

A proclamation from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Christians of Corinth



Brothers and sisters:

³ No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴ There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; ⁵ there are different forms of service but the same Lord; ⁶ there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.

¹² As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

The Word of the Lord!

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful,
and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

THE GOSPEL (*Jn 20:19-23*)

A proclamation from the holy Gospel according to John



¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”

The Gospel of the Lord!

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Priest/Leader: Let us pray to God our Father who gives us His Spirit through Jesus, His Son.

1. For the Holy Father, our Bishop, priests, religious, and catechists, that in their work they may seek the guidance of the Spirit, let us pray!
All: Lord, hear our prayer!
2. For our Christian community, that we may remove all obstacles which prevent the action of the Spirit in us, let us pray! *(All)*
3. For each one of us, that we may contribute to the good of our Christian community by maintaining and increasing the life in the Spirit within us, let us pray! *(All)*
4. For people feeling sad or anxious, for those deprived of consolation, and for discouraged Christians, that they may receive from the Holy Spirit the comfort, light and strength they need, let us pray! *(All)*
5. For all human beings, that they may find fervent Christians to lead them to repentance, faith in Christ, and the possession of the life in the Spirit, let us pray! *(All)*

Priest/Leader: Father in heaven, we thank You for having sent Your Son to communicate to us the Holy Spirit. Make us active members of our Christian community so that Your Spirit may take possession of every heart around us. We ask this through Christ our Lord. – Amen!

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Grant, we pray, O Lord,
that, as promised by your Son,
the Holy Spirit may reveal to us more abundantly
the hidden mystery of this sacrifice
and graciously lead us into all truth.
Through Christ our Lord. – Amen!

PREFACE *(Pentecost)*

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.
For, bringing your Paschal Mystery to completion,
you bestowed the Holy Spirit today
on those you made your adopted children
by uniting them to your Only Begotten Son.
This same Spirit, as the Church came to birth,
opened to all peoples the knowledge of God
and brought together the many languages of the earth

in profession of the one faith.
Therefore, overcome with paschal joy,
every land, every people exults in your praise
and even the heavenly Powers, with the angelic hosts,
sing together the unending hymn of your glory,
as they acclaim:

Holy, holy, holy . . .

COMMUNION ANTIPHON (*Acts 2:4.11*)

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit
and spoke of the marvels of God, alleluia.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O God, who bestow heavenly gifts upon your Church,
safeguard, we pray, the grace you have given,
that the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out upon her
may retain all its force
and that this spiritual food
may gain her abundance of eternal redemption.
Through Christ our Lord. – Amen!

CATECHESIS

Note: The readings today are the same for all the three years. Therefore you may make use of the explanation given for today in Years B and C.

Easter and Pentecost are the two oldest feasts celebrated in the Church, and the two are intimately connected. We complete today the period of Easter Season, the most important period in the Liturgical Year.

- “*Pentecost*” is a Greek word which means “*the 50th*”; in our case, it means “*the 50th day*.”
 - For the Jews, it meant *the 50th day after the feast of the Passover*.
 - For us Christians, it means *the feast that comes on the 50th day after Easter*.
- Pentecost was originally a Jewish feast, one of the *three main festivals* which the Jews celebrated upon the instruction of God himself (*see Ex 23:14-17*). These three festivals are:
 - the feast of the *Passover*, which occurred in March-April;
 - the feast of *Pentecost*, which is observed some time in May-June;

- the feast of the *Tents*, which they kept in September-October. The three were called “*pilgrim festivals*” because adult males living within a reasonable distance from Jerusalem were bound to attend the worship in the Temple during those days. The most solemn of the three was the Passover, but Pentecost also attracted a large number of pilgrims, as it is clear from today’s First Reading.

1. God’s wisdom in saving man is made clear in the way He linked His saving deeds to the various festivals He Himself had established in the Old Testament.

- Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, God established the feast of the Passover so that the Jews might keep in mind how their ancestors had been saved from the slavery of Pharaoh through God’s special intervention.

But even when God ordered the festival of the Passover to be celebrated, He already had determined that the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus would take place during that feast, hundreds of years later.

God planned this so that the liberation of the people of Israel from Pharaoh would become a symbol of the liberation of all men from the slavery of the devil, which Jesus would achieve through his passion and death. *Thus, the Jewish feast of the Passover became a symbol of our feast of Easter.*

- Something similar happened with the Jewish feast of Pentecost. God chose that day to send the Holy Spirit on the apostles, thus bringing the Church to life. In fact, Pentecost Day has been called “*the birthday of the Church.*”

God could not have chosen a more fitting day to send His Holy Spirit on the apostles. Pentecost Day was significant because:

- On Pentecost Day, the Jews celebrated *the establishing of the Covenant* between God and the Israelites in the desert – a Covenant which formally brought into existence God’s special people.

God precisely chose that same day to ratify His *New Covenant*, which Christ had already sealed on the cross with his own blood and which marked the origin of the Church, the new People of God. This same covenant is sealed by the Spirit in the heart of each Christian at Baptism.

- On Pentecost Day, the Jews celebrated *the giving of the Ten Commandments* by God on Mount Sinai. They reverently called the commandments, “*The Law.*”

God also chose Pentecost Day to promulgate “*The New Law of Love*” which Jesus established. This law consisted of a single command: “*Love one another as I have loved you*” (Jn 13:34), which can be observed only in the power of the Spirit.

The Ten Commandments had been written on stone tablets by God Himself. This new law of love would be written by the

Holy Spirit in the heart of each person, as the prophet Ezekiel had foretold. (*See Ez 36:27.*)

- On Pentecost Day, the Jews celebrated *the completion of the grain harvest*. That was the day that God chose to gather an abundant harvest of souls who, moved by Peter's preaching, joined the Church. Pentecost marked the beginning of a harvest that would go on down the centuries and will last as long as there is a single soul to be saved.

We must admire God's wisdom and His love in planning every detail in His work of saving man. We must admire the way He helps us to understand those plans.

2. A double outpouring of the Spirit

- While the First Reading narrates the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles and the other disciples on Pentecost Day, the Gospel, on the other hand, sends us back to what had taken place on the evening of Jesus' resurrection.

a) *The first communication of the Holy Spirit*

- Jesus hastened to communicate the Spirit to the apostles at his very first meeting with them after his rising from the dead. As a rich and generous person is eager to share his treasures with those he loves, so Jesus did not delay even for a moment to communicate the Holy Spirit to the apostles.

It was his own Spirit, his own divine life, which the Jews could not destroy on the cross. For the apostles, it was a most precious treasure, a unique gift which Jesus had obtained for them and for all men at the price of his blood.

- Together with the gift of the Spirit, Jesus presented his apostles with all the gifts which the Spirit brings:

- *the gift of forgiveness:*

What Jesus did at that moment was *to baptize the apostles* with the Holy Spirit, as John the Baptist had announced. (*See Lk 3:16.*) And as light dispels darkness, so did the Spirit wipe away every stain of sin from the souls of the apostles. They had to be forgiven first before they could make use of the power to forgive the sins of others, which Jesus was about to communicate to them.

- *And with forgiveness, the gift of peace:*

Not just any peace, but Jesus' own peace, which he had bequeathed to them after the Last Supper. (*See Jn 14:27.*)

- *And with peace, the gift of joy:*

A joy, the like of which they had never experienced before – the joy Jesus himself was experiencing within his heart.

Jesus proved to be generous with his apostles. At that moment they could hardly imagine the change that was taking place within themselves.

b) *The communication of the Spirit on Pentecost Day*

- In Luke’s narration of the events on Pentecost Day, Jesus does not appear anywhere. Neither is any voice heard speaking from heaven.

However, the wind is God’s language, and the flames are the sign of His presence. The effects of the Holy Spirit on the apostles are there for everyone to see:

- *in the wisdom communicated to the apostles* – One cannot help but be surprised at Peter’s confidence in his discourse; a man who was almost illiterate was speaking as no theologian ever could; and
 - *in the urge moving the apostles to announce Christ* – They could not keep the resurrection of Christ to themselves; they were compelled to proclaim it. Astonishing also is the courage displayed by the apostles in doing so, when only moments before, they had been a group of frightened people!
- The communication of the Spirit to the apostles on the day of Jesus’ resurrection was for them *a real baptism*; the communication on Pentecost Day acted in them *as a confirmation*. The Church has shown true wisdom in the choice of today’s readings. This wisdom will shine further as we examine the Second Reading taken from the First Letter of Paul to the Christians of Corinth.

3. It should always be Pentecost in our Christian community.

- The Book of the Acts of the Apostles makes it clear that Jesus did not limit the communication of the Holy Spirit to his apostles to the two occasions of Easter and Pentecost. As the Church was born on Pentecost Day, the parable of the tree and the branches explained by Jesus to his apostles after the Last Supper (*see Jn 15:1-8*) became a reality. A continuous flow of life was established between Jesus, the trunk of the tree, and the branches, which is what the apostles were.
- Similarly, Jesus’ communication of the Spirit within our community is not limited to the occasions when Baptism and Confirmation are administered in our midst. There is a flow of life between Jesus and us which Paul compares to the communication of life between the head and the members in a human body.
- Time and again throughout his letters, Paul makes use of this symbol of the human body to express what Christ and the Spirit are for us and for our Christian community: *Christ is the head, the believers*

are the members, and the Spirit is the life-giving soul of the Church, in general, and of our Christian community, in particular.

- No other comparison could better express the work which the Spirit is carrying out within us at this very moment as we are gathered here for Sunday Eucharist/Service.
 - The Spirit is **cleansing us** of our sins. He continues to do it at all times because sin clings to us in a thousand ways.
 - He is **restoring our peace**: peace *within our hearts*, which are always torn by anxiety, and peace *among us*, which selfishness threatens at all times.
 - He is **pouring joy** into our hearts: the true joy which replaces the sadness that the empty joys of sin leave within us.
 - He is **giving us light**, so that we may understand God's word, and **true wisdom** to help us discover God's plans of love for us.
 - And He is **giving us strength**: the strength **to witness to Him** through a true Christian life and the strength **"to forgive sins,"** i.e., to heal the inevitable wounds which we unfortunately inflict on each other. Only the Spirit can lead us to forgive each other sincerely.

- When the Spirit is communicated to each one of us, there is a particular aspect which shows both Jesus' love and the wisdom of the Spirit: the Spirit communicates Himself to us **"in our own language,"** keeping in mind our individual needs and adapting Himself to our situation at all times.

In communicating his Spirit to us, Jesus has not been less generous with us than he was with his apostles. He keeps offering the Spirit to us at every moment. It should always be Pentecost within our Christian community. How sad it would be if we refused the Holy Spirit whom Jesus offers so generously or if we blocked His action within us!

4. Though the Spirit is given to each one individually, it is given for the sake of the Body, for the sake of the Christian community.

- This is the important lesson Paul meant to convey in today's Second Reading. The Spirit is a precious gift. However, receiving Him imposes on us very serious obligations:
 - a) First and foremost, **the Spirit demands that we be at all times healthy members of the Christian community**, of the body to which we belong.
 - Dry branches are destined to be burned (*see Jn 15:6*), and dead members have to be amputated for the sake of the body. Anything that we do against the Holy Spirit, even our most secret sin, negatively affects the life of the community to which we belong. Merely being slack in our Christian life is already an offense, both against the Spirit and against the community.

b) *The Spirit demands that we share the gifts we receive.*

- The early community of Jerusalem went to the extreme of sharing whatever they possessed among the members. This is not always feasible, though the Spirit *does demand* also in our own days that we come to the rescue of the poorer members in the community. Concern for the poor and needy around us will always be a sign of the presence of the Spirit in us.

- But there should be *no limitation in the sharing of the spiritual gifts* which the Spirit brings. This entails:
 - *A sharing within the Christian community.* We must share our faith, our prayer, our knowledge, advice, encouragement, peace, joy Nothing should be kept selfishly away from our brothers. A true Christian is one who considers himself *permanently at the service of the community.*
 - *A sharing with non-believers and non-Catholics.* The example of Peter on Pentecost Day speaks for itself; he started proclaiming Christ the moment he received the Holy Spirit. Faith in Christ is a treasure, but it is quite different from earthly treasures. In the case of earthly possessions, the more you share, the less you are left with. Not so with our faith: it has to be shared; and the more generously you share it, the stronger it grows within you.
If we do not feel the urge of communicating to others the gifts of the Spirit, we should start asking ourselves whether they are still with us.

c) *Each and every Christian is called to contribute to the welfare and growth of the Christian community.*

- Doctors are not yet sure of the real purpose certain organs have in the human body. But no doctor is so foolish as to state that any given organ, even those apparently insignificant, serves no purpose.
This is still more true of the body of Christ to which we belong. Let no one think himself/herself useless or of little value. We all should be conscious of two things: of our sinfulness and of our great worth. We all should feel that we are:
 - *sinner*s – good only to burn in hell as long as we persevere in our sinfulness; and yet
 - *precious to God* after having been redeemed through Christ's death. Merchants do not pay a high sum for a worthless thing. We must be of great value to God since, as Peter says, We "*were ransomed with the precious blood of Christ*" (1 Pt 1:18,19).

- We are called to contribute greatly to the Christian community from the very moment the Spirit is given to us. God does not measure our usefulness or uselessness by human standards. It

all depends on the vigor of the life in the Spirit within us. There is no alternative in the life of a Christian. *We either help or harm the Christian community*, depending on whether we are healthy or sickly or dead members in the body of Christ. These are serious considerations. We should praise Christ daily for the gift of the Spirit and strive constantly to maintain and increase the life in the Spirit within us.

SUMMARY

1. God's wisdom and love are shown in His careful planning to save us and in the wonderful ways He makes those plans known to us.
2. Jesus kept communicating his Spirit to the apostles throughout their life. He does the same with every Christian. Were it possible for us to see the wonderful work of the Spirit within us, we would die out of joy.
3. Whatever gifts the Spirit brings to us are meant for the building up of the Christian community. We must at all times be healthy members of the body of Christ and share the gifts of the Spirit with everyone around us.
4. A poor farmer can be of more use to the Church than a priest, a bishop, or even the Pope. All we have to do in order to be useful is to keep the life in the Spirit vigorous within us. No amount of material things we may contribute will be of use to the community as long as we are sickly or dead members of the body of Christ.