

Pentecost - Yr. A

Reading I: Acts 2:1-11

Responsorial Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

Gospel: John 20:19-23

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/052823-Day.cfm>



Descent of the Holy Spirit

Pentecost marks the culmination of the Paschal season. It began with Lent as we prepared to join Jesus in dying and being raised to new life. It continued in the Easter season as we integrated more deeply the gift of God's new life into our life. As we celebrate Pentecost, our focus turns to the mission that flows from this new life. Our readings are from the Acts of the Apostles, the First Letter to the Corinthians, and the Gospel of John. This is also one of two times a year that there is a sequence.

Pentecost comes from the Greek word for "fiftieth". It is the 50th day after Easter. In Judaism,

It was 50 days after Passover and marked the completion of the spring grain harvest. In religious circles, it marked the 50 days that Israelites journeyed out of slavery in Egypt to the encounter with God at Mt. Sinai and the giving of the commandments. Just as the law was central to the life of Jewish people, the Spirit is central to the life of the Christian community.

As we end the Easter season, our passage from Acts comes from the beginning of the book rather than at the conclusion. On the previous Sundays, we have been reading about how the Apostles lived and acted in the months and years after the resurrection. The question arises, how did they, uneducated fishermen and peasants, enter a new way of living? The answer is the Holy Spirit coming upon them and empowering them to be witnesses and to continue the ministry of Christ. Both the sections from Acts and the Gospel describe the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles.

Acts describes the coming of the Spirit as a mighty wind. Ruah is the Hebrew word for wind, breath, or spirit. It is rooted in movement from power. The Ruah moved over the water at the beginning of creation while everything was formless chaos and brought the created world forward as God spoke the Word. Here the disciples have encountered the Word of God in Jesus and the Spirit brings forth a new people by dwelling in them.

Wind, fire, and water are understood as liquids in the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, they are spoken of as being poured out. "... when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel says the Lord God." ([Ez 39:29](#)) Tongues of fire bring to mind that God appeared as fire in the burning bush to Moses. It also has power. The Spirit enters them and empowers them to bring God's presence to the world.

" And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. ... we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God." There is no definition of what took place as the Apostles spoke. Were they able to speak in new languages or was the miracle that everyone heard in their own language? It is unclear. It may be a reference to God reuniting the human family after it became divided at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11: 1 – 9). The work of the Spirit went on to reconnect the Samaritans and the Jewish Christians and bring about a relationship between the Jewish Christians and Gentiles. These were two large divisions in the human family that were bridged by the work of the Spirit.

The gift of the Spirit in the Gospel is also presented as enabling a mission of which human hearts were incapable – forgiveness. Jesus breathes (notice breathe!) and says receive the Spirit. Forgive! In both presentations, the disciples are sent for do carry on Jesus' mission.

The passage from St Paul has two key points. The Spirit enables us in diverse ways. We cannot profess faith except by the power of the Spirit; we cannot lay down our lives in loving service except by the Spirit; and we cannot be part of the community, the Body of Christ, except by the Spirit. The Spirit gives each of us gifts, some for within the church community and some for the human community. (Being a good administrator (Rom 12:8)

It seems that in early communities, some thought that particular gifts made them more important than other people. Paul challenges them that just like the human body needs all its parts, the church needs all the gifts to fulfill the mission of Christ.

The sequence is a poetic meditation on a key mystery in the Christian experience. Originally connected to the Alleluia verse before the Gospel, they now stand as a reflection between the earlier readings and the Alleluia and Gospel. Currently, there are two principal sequences used on Easter and Pentecost. These are reflective and contemplative to help us gain insight into the great work of God. There are also two optional ones, one for the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ and one for Our Lady of Sorrows.

Reflection Questions:

What do the symbols of wind, breath, and fire convey to you?

When you pray, do you address the Holy Spirit? What names or terms do you use?

How is the Spirit empowering and inviting you to continue the ministry of Jesus?

What gifts have you been given to assist others and build up the Body of Christ?

How does the Spirit unite you with other people from diverse backgrounds and origins?

What does the Spirit's presence mean to you for your life?

Themes

Holy Spirit

Unity of the human family

Gifts of the Spirit

Continuing the ministry of Jesus

Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that we may recognize and use all the gifts that God has given us for the good of others and the fulfillment of the mission of Jesus

For a flourishing of the fruits of the Spirit: that we may manifest love, joy, peace, patience, and all the fruits of the Spirit in our lives

For a renewed sense of mission: that the Spirit will inspire us in confronting the watered-down values of society and in building a society of justice and peace

For Christian Unity: that the Spirit will heal the wounds and misunderstandings that divide the Body of Christ and lead us in offering a common proclamation of the Gospel

For a Spirit of forgiveness: that God will break the bonds of resentment and vengeance that hold our hearts and free us to forgive as God has forgiven us