

Solemnity of Pentecost

[Reading I: Acts 2:1-11](#) [Responsorial Psalm: 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34](#)

[Reading II: 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13; or Galatians 5:16-25](#)

[Gospel: John 20:19-23; or John 15:26-27; 16:12-15](#)

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

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/pentecost-sunday-mass-during-day>



The Easter season draws to a close with the celebration of Pentecost. Pentecost refers to the 50th day. In Judaism, it is the 50th day after Passover and marks the end of the spring wheat harvest. It was spiritually associated with the giving of the commandments at Mount Sinai after the people fled Egypt. In Christianity, it marks the 50th day after Easter and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church. Sometimes it is referred to as the birthday of the church.

The first reading recounts the bestowal of the Holy Spirit that was promised in last week's reading. The Apostles and others, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, were sequestered in the upper room where the Last Supper had been celebrated. They were hiding for fear of persecution.

The Holy Spirit is presented under two symbols. There is the sound of a strong driving wind (powerful, forceful) that connects with the Hebrew word, Ruah, which means wind, breath, or spirit. The strong, forceful spirit is present. There also appeared tongues of fire that conveyed both the cleaning that fire does and a reversal of the division of people into different tongues at the tower of Babel in Genesis.

They then proceeded to the rooftop and began announcing the Gospel message. They were transformed and spoke with courage. They became partakers in the mission of Jesus and lived in a new way. They spoke in their language, but everyone understood them even though the crowd gathered was from throughout the Mediterranean region. The gift that each one was able to understand was not the work of the disciples. They were not in control. It was God who was working through them.

Both the second reading and the Gospel have two options. The first option is the traditional reading that is always used in year A of the cycle of Sunday readings. It is an option in years B and C. The second option is an alternative scripture that also speaks about the work of the Holy Spirit. I will offer a few comments on each reading.

The passage from the First Letter to the Corinthians 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, so the church needs all the gifts to fulfill the mission of Christ. Within this Body, there are no distinctions. In the ancient world, the major distinctions were Jew and Gentile (Greeks), slaves and free (and listed in other places, female and male). In our culture, distinctions are still made between female and male, educated and uneducated, poor and rich, and various races. All who are baptized share in the same Spirit. We are all sisters and brothers to one another. We are challenged to break through the divisions presented in our culture and become one body helping one another along the path of salvation and in service

to one another. Christianity is not solely about saving oneself. As a community, we are joining one another in receiving God's gift of salvation and helping one another respond to it. In the Letter to the Galatians, Paul presents the contrast between life with God and life lived in the Spirit. The use of "flesh" is not focused on the body. In Paul, the "flesh" refers to unredeemed humanity, the self-centered human nature. It is the human orientation in a life that is not connected to God. The fruits of the Spirit are the orientation and vision for living through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This orientation produces unity, harmony, and cooperation in the human family and peace and connectedness within a person. These reflect the life that Christ lived. These fruits are important virtues to reflect upon and to ask the Spirit to help them grow in us.

Another contrast is shown by the use of works and fruit. Work is used to describe the outcome of the flesh. It comes from the orientation of unredeemed humanity. Work comes from human nature. The work of the Spirit produces fruit. These fruits are not the result of human activity but are the result of God's work with the person. God can achieve far more than any person can achieve. Like fruit in nature, these virtues develop slowly and need to be nurtured along their development with prayer and spiritual practice.

The sequence is a poetic meditation on a key mystery in the Christian experience initially connected to the Alleluia verse before the Gospel. They now stand as a reflection between the earlier readings and the Alleluia and Gospel. In centuries past, there were several sequences for various feasts. Now, two sequences are regularly used, one on Easter and the other on Pentecost. (There are two other optional ones for The Body and Blood of the Lord and For Our Lady of Sorrows.) These are reflective and contemplative to help us gain insight into the great work of God.

The first Gospel option was also used on Easter Sunday. Jesus gives the Spirit to the disciples on Easter night. 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! The disciples are sent to continue the mission of Jesus.

The second Gospel option presents two aspects of the presence of the Spirit in a believer. Jesus was sent forth to proclaim the reign of God at his baptism when the Spirit descended upon him. Each believer is also missioned to bear witness to the Gospel and likewise missioned by the Spirit. Christians are called to give witness in their deeds and words to God's reign.

Secondly, if disciples are to bear witness, they must be guided and given a message to speak. Jesus promises the Spirit of Truth who will guide us to all truth. This truth will not be from our effort but from the presence of the Spirit. The Spirit will not bring new revelations to us but will help us to announce the same truth that Jesus proclaimed. Truth has been a source of debate. In our limited abilities, we can only grasp some truth. Only God has all the truth, and as disciples, we need to ask God for the truth. It is easy to make our perception into the full message. Our perceptions are always limited. The spirit and the community of believers help us widen our perspective to grasp a larger truth. The message must continually be presented in new ways so that each generation can hear the message in ways that address the culture and needs of each period.

Themes:

Pentecost

Virtues

Holy Spirit

Ministry

Questions for reflection:

Have you experienced the Spirit in your life?

How has God worked through a messy situation in your life to bring forth a good outcome?

What gifts, abilities, or talents do you recognize in yourself as gifts from God?

What gifts do you need to fulfill your calling or obligations?

What fruits (virtues) do you wish to develop more fully?

How has the Spirit helped you to forgive someone?

What challenges do you face in recognizing the truth?

How can the Spirit help you to live the truth more fully?

Suggestions for Prayer:

For the Church: that God will pour out the Spirit in a new and abundant way to renew all believers and strengthen us to further the mission of Jesus

For healing of the human family: that God will heal the divisions between women and men, poor and rich, and every race so that we may work together for the good of every person and the fulfillment of God's plan

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

For the grace to live in the truth: that the Spirit of God will lead us into a greater understanding of who we are and of what God is asking of us

For Christian unity: that the Spirit will bring forth forgiveness for past wounds, a new spirit of trust, and opportunities to work and pray together for God's glory