

## Pentecost Sunday - May 23, 2021

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“When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together.” The apostles were gathered to celebrate the feast of Pentecost as we do today ... but it was a different feast to Jews of Jesus day. It was the Harvest Festival recognizing Yahweh as the source of agricultural fertility. Greek-speaking Jews called it “Pentecost” referring to fifty-day period culminating in the harvest. The feast was one of thanksgiving to God for a harvest season brought to a successful fulfillment. And it was incumbent on all devout Jews ... regardless of where they might live ... to make their way to Jerusalem ... to celebrate the feast. So, Jerusalem was packed with Jews from all over the Mediterranean world. Some spoke Greek, some Latin, some Egyptian ... and the many other languages of the Roman Empire.

Imagine how these apostles felt as they gathered for the feast. Jesus had ascended and I am sure they felt emptiness, perhaps fear, certainly confusion. They knew Jesus expected something from them. He had told them to Go and teach all nations ... and to baptize. Not sure what to expect ... they waited for this Advocate ... this “Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father”. They did not know what to expect ... but they trusted Jesus and ... so they waited.

Jesus had not selected these apostles randomly. Sometimes I think we can unfairly glean from Sacred Scripture a negative picture of these men. Yes ... they were flawed ... but Jesus selected them and ... Jesus knew what He was doing. He saw qualities in them that could be built on. He had selected each of them for a purpose ... even though they frequently just didn’t seem to get it. But He knew ... in His heart that they would not ... could not understand ... they could not be complete ... until ... He would send ... the Holy Spirit ... Only then ... could they understand. Only then ... could they testify.

And, of course, Holy Spirit did come ... not to change who these men were ... because they were ... the men Jesus selected them to be ... but to bring them the gifts of the Holy spirit ... to fulfill them ... to complete them. And their testimony would begin that very day as ... “they began to speak in different tongues ...”. They began to understand what Christ had been telling them ... what Christ wanted of them ... and they began to bring Jesus’ command to fulfillment ... to proclaim the good news of Christ to all the world. And they did so with eloquence ... and with courage ... demonstrating an understanding heretofore heard only from the mouth of Christ Himself. They began the work for which they had been chosen. And the results were profound ... and they were immediate! We are told that about three thousand were baptized that very day! And just as false pride led to division and confusion at the tower of Babel ... Pentecost revealed the Holy Spirit uniting and creating understanding.

So, of course, Pentecost carries a different meaning for us today ... and yet ... perhaps not so very different. Because ... just as the old Pentecost celebrated the God’s fulfillment of the harvest after fifty days ... we now celebrate ... that fulfillment ... of Christ’s promise ... the coming of the Holy Spirit to His apostles ... His chosen ones ... fifty days after the Resurrection and the beginning of the church’s Harvest of souls. Fittingly ... we also celebrate today, what some have called the birth of the Church ... because from that day of Pentecost ... the Good News of Christ ... would begin to be spread ... through the work of these apostles ... these first bishops ... throughout the entire world.

This Age of the Church was ushered in by this outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Christ is still with us ... but now He lives and acts in and through His Church ... and through the sacraments. And it is through the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and through the sacraments that the salvation of Christ is made present to us today. And it is through the teaching of the Church that the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to us.

For without the gifts of the Holy Spirit ... we would look at Jesus and see only a man ... as did the religious leaders of his day. With the Holy Spirit we see the Word made flesh, the Son, the Anointed One of God ... for truly, "No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit." Just as the Holy Spirit completed and fulfilled the Apostles ... He does also with us. We can have IQ's that are off the charts ... but without the Holy Spirit ... we have no wisdom. We can put our very lives on the line ... but without the Holy Spirit ... it is not true courage ... but merely foolish bravado. And we can spend our lives in school ... earning degree upon degree ... but without the Holy Spirit ... we can never have true knowledge or understanding. The Holy Spirit fulfills us ... the Holy Spirit completes us. And this ... is what we celebrate today. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.