

PENTECOST

YEAR A



Prayer

Psalm 104:1, 24, 29–31, 34

Bless the LORD, O my soul.
O LORD my God, you are
very great. You are clothed
with honor and majesty,
O LORD, how manifold
are your works! In wisdom
you have made them all;
the earth is full of your
creatures.

When you hide your
face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their
breath, they die and return
to their dust.

When you send forth your
spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of
the ground.

May the glory of the LORD
endure forever; may the
LORD rejoice in his works—
May my meditation be
pleasing to him, for I
rejoice in the LORD.

Reading the Word

Acts 2:1–11

When the day of Pentecost
had come, they were all
together in one place. And
suddenly from heaven there
came a sound like the rush
of a violent wind, and it filled
the entire house where they
were sitting. Divided tongues,

as of fire, appeared among
them, and a tongue rested
on each of them. All of them
were filled with the Holy
Spirit and began to speak in
other languages, as the Spirit
gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews
from every nation under
heaven living in Jerusalem.
And at this sound the crowd
gathered and was bewildered,
because each one heard
them speaking in the native
language of each. Amazed
and astonished, they asked,
“Are not all these who are
speaking Galileans? And how
is it that we hear, each of us,
in our own native language?
Parthians, Medes, Elamites,
and residents of Mesopo-
tamia, Judea and Cappado-
cia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia
and Pamphylia, Egypt and
the parts of Libya belonging
to Cyrene, and visitors from
Rome, both Jews and prose-
lytes, Cretans and Arabs—in
our own languages we hear
them speaking about God’s
deeds of power.”

1 Corinthians 12:3–7, 12–13

I want you to understand
that no one speaking by the
Spirit of God ever says “Let
Jesus be cursed!” and no one

can say “Jesus is Lord” except
by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of
gifts, but the same Spirit; and
there are varieties of services,
but the same Lord; and there
are varieties of activities, but
it is the same God who acti-
vates all of them in everyone.
To each is given the mani-
festation of the Spirit for the
common good.

For just as the body is one
and has many members, and
all the members of the body,
though many, are one body,
so it is with Christ. For in the
one Spirit we were all bap-
tized into one body—Jews or
Greeks, slaves or free—and
we were all made to drink of
one Spirit.

John 20:19–23

When it was evening on that
day, the first day of the week,
and the doors of the house
where the disciples had met
were locked for fear of the
Jews, Jesus came and stood
among them and said, “Peace
be with you.” After he said this,
he showed them his hands
and his side. Then the disci-

*Scripture quotations from
New Revised Standard Version Bible:
Catholic Edition, © 1989, 1993.
Used with permission.*

FIRST READING

Acts 2:1–11

PSALM

Psalm 104:1, 24, 29–31, 34

SECOND READING

1 Corinthians 12:3–7, 12–13

GOSPEL

John 20:19–23

ples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "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."

Hearing the Word

*"The Voice, the Blood,
and the Life"*

The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, known as Pentecost, marks the beginning of the Church's existence, and its subsequent expansion. The feast's rich readings employ the images of the voice, blood and life to describe the central role of the Holy Spirit in the beginning, and in the life, of this new community of faith.

In the first reading Luke devotes much attention and detail to the manner of the Holy Spirit's descent. His presentation of the coming of the Spirit accompanied by great wind and tongues of fire includes two ingenious double references. In Hebrew, the word for wind is the same as the word for "the spirit". This double meaning of the word recalls Ezekiel 37:9-14 where God sends the wind or spirit in order to animate the dry bones of the fallen Israelites. The room where the disciples were gathered was filled with the wind, which means that God's Spirit filled it.

The Spirit descended upon the disciples as tongues of fire. The word "tongue" in Greek also carries a double meaning, referring either to the physical organ or to the language or speech. This suggests that the Spirit filling the disciples enabled them to speak. This ability is immediately confirmed as the Spirit-filled disciples are able to communicate "God's deeds of power" to a large crowd of people from different language and ethnic groups who are able to understand the message.

The timing of the Spirit's descent is likewise important. It happened on the Jewish feast of Pentecost. On this occasion the Israelites gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Sinai Covenant, particularly the gift of the Law. On Sinai God descended upon the mountain as burning fire (Exod 19:18), while Moses went up to meet God and to receive the Law. This Law would constitute the Israelites as a nation, and guide the nation's life ever after. In Jerusalem the Spirit also descended upon the disciples as fire, to guide their missionary efforts, and to direct the life of the community of believers ever after. Just as on Sinai the people of the first covenant received the gift of the Law and commemorated the event on Pentecost, so also, on the very same day, the new community of God's people, founded on Jesus' resurrection, received the Spirit who would be its guide. The

day when the Sinai covenant was made was the birth of Israel, the day when the Spirit was given was the day when Christianity came into existence.

No one pays more attention to the role of Holy Spirit than Paul. In the passage from 1 Corinthians read today, the apostle describes the Spirit as the binding agent responsible for creating coherence and harmony among the members of the community. According to him, the working of the Holy Spirit is first evident when a person is able to recognise and acknowledge Jesus as the Lord. Many of Paul's contemporaries rejected Jesus as the Lord, considering him as just an ordinary human being. However, those able to acknowledge Jesus as the Lord evidently were led to this insight by the Holy Spirit working in them. Second, the Spirit gives specific gifts to individual community members. These gifts are very diverse, and Christians in Corinth foolishly argued about which of them are the most important ones (cf. 1 Cor 12:14-31). Paul shows the folly of such arguments, emphasising that these gifts are given to the individuals not for self-glorification but for the service in the community, for mutual benefit. The Spirit "manages" the Church by providing it with the talents and ministries needed for its proper functioning.

Paul also uses a very meaningful image of the Church as the body of Christ. He

sees Christians as the body of Christ on earth because they have been “made to drink of one Spirit”. If Christ is the head and the faithful are the body, then the Spirit can be likened to the blood that runs through its veins, making it alive.

Today’s Gospel passage focuses on Jesus’ commissioning of the disciple and the gift of the Spirit. First, a parallel with the creation story in Genesis 2 becomes immediately apparent. While Luke presented the coming of the Spirit as descending tongues of fire, John presents it as a new creation. In Genesis God made the first human alive by breathing his breath into an effigy he had molded out of clay. Jesus “breaths” the Holy Spirit into the disciples. However, the outcome of both of these accounts is much the same – both in Acts and in John the disciples are empowered and sent on a mission.

There is a difference in the description of this mission between Luke and John. In Acts the disciples are to proclaim the risen Lord to the ends of the earth. In John the disciples’ mission is “forgiving and retaining sins”. It might seem strange that their mission focuses on sin. This is, however, easily understood in the context of the entire Gospel. When John speaks of sin, most often he means the sin of unbelief. The greatest sin in the Gospel of John is refusal to believe in Jesus as the Son of God (cf. John 15:21; 16:8-9). Speaking of sins

in today’s passage, John refers to the disciples’ power to remove the sin of unbelief by their proclamation of the risen Jesus. At the same time, they ought also to announce God’s judgement upon those who continue to persist in their unbelief, which is in line with what Jesus taught (cf. John 3:18). Despite apparent differences, the Spirit-empowered mission of the disciples in both Acts and in John has an identical goal – bringing people to faith in the risen Lord, with the effect that they would have eternal life through him.

In the light of the three readings of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit emerges as the very life of the Church. The Spirit is its voice as it descended upon the disciples in tongues of fire and enabled them to communicate with all. The Spirit is its very blood which enlivens the body of Christ consisting of diversely gifted members. Finally, the Spirit is the very life of this community breathed into it by Jesus. For the disciples, the Spirit became the guide for their mission. For the early Christians, the Spirit was the giver of a variety of gifts with which they were to build and develop the community of faith. Above all, the Spirit empowered the disciples to remove the sin of unbelief and lead people to faith in Jesus the Lord, so that they may have life in its fullness (John 20:31). In this context, the truthfulness and significance of the Psalmist’s words becomes apparent as

he stated, “when you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth”.

Listening to the Word of God

Science and observation have taught us about the immense power of wind. The power of the wind, when harnessed can power huge machines, drive sailing ships, or move gigantic desert dunes. Its force can topple trees and building, it can also move clouds so that the rain may fall. The author of the Acts of the Apostles may not have been a scientist in the modern sense, but would certainly have understood and respected wind’s enormous power. He fittingly employs this image of the wind to describe the transforming power of the Spirit’s presence.

In choosing to describe the events preceding the coming of the Holy Spirit with expressions like “rush of a violent wind” and “tongues as of fire”, coupled with the use of the adverb “suddenly”, the author undoubtedly sought to make not only a theological point but also an existential one, namely, the power of the Holy Spirit to cause change. Understandably, immediately after he had spoken of the fact that they were filled with the Holy Spirit, he adds that “they began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability”. The action of the Holy Spirit was so evident that the crowd was filled with amazement and wonder. There is a proverb that states,

“the proof of having swam in the sea is the taste of salt on the body”. Similarly, when a person is truly filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, the evidence is there for all to see. Paul affirms that the Holy Spirit makes his presence manifest through the gifts he bestows on the community members. Christian ministry is therefore, one of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit's presence.

Another proverb states, “birds are given wings for flying and not for decoration”. In the same way, being filled with the Holy Spirit serves a purpose. Before Jesus breathed upon his apostles and said, “receive the Holy Spirit”, he first told them, “as the Father has sent me, so I send you.” There is a sending element that comes with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. When we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us, he equips us with all kinds of spiritual gifts and abilities for different forms of service, and then sends us on a mission. Our lives as Christians would be directionless and fruitless if it were not for the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit gave birth to the Church and the Church grows in the power of the Spirit. The Church is not just a building made of cement, sand, stone and water, but primarily an assembly of people whose faith in Jesus has brought them together. As we yield to the person and presence of the Holy Spirit, the Church grows, but when we stifle the action of the Holy Spirit, the

Church shrinks. In the face of the innumerable challenges that beset our world, the Church needs an on-going Pentecost – an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon willing men and women, old and young, who constitute the Body of Christ – to renew the face of the earth. May that be our desire, our prayer and quest on this special day.

Proverb

“The proof of having swam in the sea is the taste of salt on the body”.

Action

Self-examination

Am I living a life in the Spirit or a life apart from the Spirit? What are the signs to differentiate between these two options?

What gifts have I been given by the Holy Spirit? Am I using them in the manner that Paul taught the Corinthians?

Response to God

The Lord promises that those who ask shall receive; those who seek shall find and those who knock shall have the door open for them. I turn to God in prayer and ask Him to renew the gift of His Holy Spirit in me.

Response to your World

As a baptized Christian I resolve to identify one of the gifts of the Spirit has given me and put it to practice during this week.

There are many ways by which we can bring the love of the Holy Spirit to our world. As a group we discuss which of the gifts of the Spirit we can put into practice to be like the Apostles at Pentecost and share the Good News with others.

Prayer

All powerful God, we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

May He empower us anew to fulfil the missionary mandate of proclaiming the Gospel to all people.

Grant this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.