

Pentecost Sunday

May 19, 2024

Readings

Acts 2:1-11

Ps 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34

1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13 *or* Gal 5:16-25

Jn 20:19-23

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Unlike the celebration of Easter, the Feast of Pentecost attracts almost no attention whatsoever outside the confines of the Church and its liturgy. And yet Pentecost ranks very high on the Christian calendar as one of the principal celebrations of the Church year. The word *Pentecost* denotes the “fiftieth day” and refers to the period transpired since the celebration of Easter Sunday. Since that Solemn Feast fifty days ago, the Easter Candle has remained burning at all liturgical gatherings, and the great Alleluia has been sung repeatedly, as the expression of the Christian community’s triumphant joy at Jesus’ victory over death, and our victory with him.

With today’s feast the Easter Season now draws to a close, and the Easter candle will be extinguished, but we should not think of Pentecost as marking simply an end to our extended Easter festivities. It is also the beginning of something new for us. For this feast celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised as our advocate and comforter, as the one who empowers us and guides us as we attempt to live out our Christian lives throughout our pilgrimage on this earth. So significant was the coming of the Spirit at the first Pentecost that we speak of that event as the birthday of the Church.

As we have read in the Scriptures these weeks following the resurrection of Jesus, the apostles and disciples were often left confused and troubled. They went back to their fishing

boats and took up where they had left off when Jesus first summoned them. They would gather to remember him, but they did so behind locked doors because they were fearful. They experienced Jesus' presence as he appeared to them alive again, but even that presence seemed not to change them very much. When he was about to leave them definitively to return to the Father, as we recalled on the Feast of the Ascension, he charged them to go out and to take his message to the ends of the earth. But, sadly, they did not have the courage to do so.

Before Jesus left the apostles, he promised that he would send the Holy Spirit upon them, and in today's feast we celebrate the fulfillment of that promise and the profound difference it made. Now those same confused and troubled men, fearful and weak, are touched. Something new happens to them – it's not merely the words of Jesus that fill their minds and hearts, it's the spirit of Jesus that takes hold of them and makes them bold. The Spirit does things in them and through them – one great sign of which is the ability of people of many different tongues to understand the preaching of Peter who spoke in the simple dialect of a humble fisherman now turned missionary.

This transformation in the lives of the apostles indicates that discipleship does not consist simply in knowing what Jesus taught. It is not even a matter of being stirred emotionally by what Jesus stood for or what he did. We become disciples when the Spirit of Jesus takes hold of us and turns our knowledge and our feelings into action, into choices that are emboldened with a courage that we did not know we had, to become people who surprise our very selves, at times, by what we find we are capable of becoming and made able to do.

This is the Spirit that helps us to stand up with fortitude, to speak with wisdom and that sends us forth with conviction to live the Gospel with integrity, faithful to what we believe. It is

the Spirit that emboldens us to speak the truth even when it is not well received, and it is the Spirit that counsels us how to do all of this with reverence and respect, with gentleness and compassion.