

The Solemnity of Pentecost: Pentecost, the Beginning of the Now

In the eleventh chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles*, Peter was confronted by Christians who had been Jewish. They said that they had heard that Peter had entered the houses of Gentiles and ate with them. “How could he do that?” They saw him as betraying his Jewish heritage. Peter explained that he had a vision of a large sheet coming down from heaven filled with many animals including reptiles and other animals that Jews would not eat, such as pigs. He heard a voice say, “Get up, Peter. Slaughter and eat.” Peter related, “But I said, ‘Certainly not, sir, because nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ But a second time a voice from heaven answered, ‘What God has made clean, you are not to call profane.’” This happened three times, and then everything was drawn up again into the sky. Just then three men appeared at the house where we were, who had been sent to me from Caesarea. The Spirit told me to accompany them without discriminating. These six brothers* also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. He related to us how he had seen (the) angel standing in his house, saying, ‘Send someone to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter, who will speak words to you by which you and all your household will be saved.’ As I began to speak, the holy Spirit fell upon them as it had upon us at the beginning, and I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the holy Spirit.’

“As the Holy Spirit fell on us at the beginning.”

In the Nineteenth chapter of *Acts*, Paul relates how he had come upon people in the city of Ephesus who had been baptized, but not with the baptism of Jesus Christ. “How have you been baptized?” Paul asked. “With the baptism of John the Baptist,” they replied. Paul then said, “John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

As the disciples spoke in tongues and prophesied on Pentecost Sunday.

Peter and Paul, and the early followers of the Lord recognized that the coming of the Holy Spirit was the beginning of the grand venture of proclaiming Jesus Christ and his Kingdom, the Kingdom of God. Christmas, the Nativity of the Word, was the beginning of the presence of the Word of God on earth as one of us. Easter was the beginning of people sharing the eternal, resurrected life of the Lord. Pentecost is the beginning of people being empowered to proclaim Jesus Christ to the world. This empowerment was evidenced by the wind, the tongues of fire, by people of many lands hearing the apostles speaking in their own language, and by the courage of the apostles proclaiming Jesus in the face of torture and death.

It all began on Pentecost. That day three thousand people became followers of the Lord. The Holy Spirit fell on them also. Their number has grown. Now in 2024,

that number has grown to 2.6 billion people of whom 1.4 billion are Catholic.

We are here because of the Holy Spirit. We are here because of the action of the Holy Spirit on the First Pentecost when the apostles experienced His Presence in the wind and tongues of fire. We are here because of the action of the Holy Spirit at our baptism and confirmation, transforming us into the People of God. We are here because of the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives calling us to serve the Lord.

Peter and Paul often spoke about how the Holy Spirit directed them, to go to some place, to say certain things, to do certain things. The Holy Spirit directs us in the same way. We just have to be open to the Holy Spirit.

There are so many times in my life, as a priest, that I have felt that I had to do a certain thing, see a certain person, and so forth. Many times I learn why I was prompted, or better, given the grace to act. A young man in our parish was suffering from cancer. His mother told me that he was getting worse. I determined to see him, even though I could not get through to him by phone. I just went to his house. It was a gated community. I did not have the password and could not raise the family. But the gate opened. I went in. The man and his wife were surprised to see me when I got to their house. He was dressed up and about to go out. I sat with him for a few minutes and gave him the Sacrament of the Sick. He died three days later. Then I was thinking about a friend of my mother's who was very sick and had just been moved to a hospice in New Port Richey. I tried to find the place, but was given the address of business offices that were closed. I tried all sorts of phone numbers until I finally found someone who patched me through to a hospice nurse who knew where the person was. I went to see the sick lady. She died a few days later. These two incidents happened in one last week. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. This is what I mean when I say that the priest has the greatest life ever. Sisters have also experienced God prompting them to say this or do that. And so have you. Everyone who is confirmed in the Spirit, is continually prompted to go into action for God.

My biggest fear is that after I die I will learn about all the times that I was not open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. I will hear about people who God wanted to use me to bring his presence and I was too taken up with myself to listen to the Spirit. I will learn about homilies that the Holy Spirit wanted me to write, but I was not open to the Spirit's presence. Ever since I was ordained, I have put the words, *Come Spirit*, at the top of each page of my homilies to call upon him and to remind myself that preaching has got to be the work of the Holy Spirit, not my work. At the same time, it reminds me that I have to do the prayer and work that allows the Holy Spirit to work through me.

How about you? Do you recognize the times that you have been open to the Holy Spirit and the times that you have ignored his prompting? I think everyone can look at times that the Spirit pointing him or her in a direction that brought the joy of God to the world. And I think that everyone can remember the times that he or she decided to ignore the prompting, and now fear the ramifications of our being closed to God.

The Holy Spirit is God. The Spirit uses us, but He is not dependent on us. If we refuse to listen to the prompting, then He, God the Third Person, will find other ways to communicate his presence.

I want to conclude by looking closely at the first part of the prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.

The Holy Spirit is fire, the fire of God's love. We feel this fire within us whenever we are open to God. Together, our own tongues of fire becomes a great blaze that renews the face of the earth.

That is how the Holy Spirit works.

It is as it was in the beginning.

Pentecost was then.

Pentecost is now.