

## REFLECTION FOR PENTECOST SUNDAY

### Pentecost, New Life in the Spirit

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Today is one of the most important feast days of the Church - Pentecost Sunday, occurring fifty days (50) after Easter and ten days (10) after the Ascension. It concludes the Easter Season and commemorates the beginning of the Church with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. Pentecost, from the Greek *Pentecoste* meaning fiftieth (50), is from the Jewish Festival of Weeks (*Hag Shevu'ot*), which is held fifty (50) days after the feast of Passover (cf. Tobit 2:1 and 2 Maccabees 12:32). The Jewish Rabbis established that the first Pentecost was at the giving of the *Torah* on Mount Sinai, fifty days after the Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 19:1).

In Acts 2:1-11, the apostles gathered in one place on Pentecost day, and Jews from every nation in the world gathered for the festival. The witnessing at this assemblage made way for fulfilling Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8, that "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth." The Gospel emphasized this theme as Jesus said to his disciples, "When the counsellor comes... the spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me. And you also will bear witness because you have been with me from the beginning" (John 15:26-27).

The Holy Spirit, who will aid the process of witnessing, comes from the Father, underscoring the intimate relationship in the Blessed Trinity. He is called the *Paraclete* from the Greek "Paracletos," meaning "helper, advocate or counsellor." He is, therefore, the mediator, intercessor, and counsellor, giving protection to those who are helpless and encouraging others. He is also called the Spirit of Truth because he will guide the disciples into the truth, and Jesus had made it clear that He is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Therefore, the Holy Spirit will witness to Jesus and make witnesses of the disciples, empowering them to go out into the world and proclaim the good news. This will bring into fulfilment what Jesus had begun in the lives of his disciples.

That Pentecost day, a sound like the rush of strong wind that filled the house and tongues like fire that rested on each of them heralded the arrival of the Holy Spirit, after which they began to speak in other tongues. The Greek words "*Pnoe*" and "*Pneuma*" both translate the Hebrew *Ruach*, which means "breath, wind or spirit." So, "wind/spirit and fire" are Biblical symbols of God's manifestation. Isaiah 66:15 says, "the Lord will come in fire and his chariots like a whirlwind." In Exodus 3:3, the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and in chapter 19:16, He descended on Mount Sinai in fire and a mighty sound. The Lord also appeared extraordinarily to Elijah in 1 Kings 19:11-13. In Mathew 3:11, John the Baptist said, "I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I...will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." The appearance of the large sound like the wind and tongues like fire symbolizes God's presence upon the apostles.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues (*lalein heterais glossais*). *Glossa* in Greek means "the tongue or language." In Mark 16:17, Jesus promised believers that "they will cast out demons and speak with new tongues." In 1 Corinthians 12:10, Paul mentioned "speaking in a variety of tongues" as part of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The emphasis, therefore, that the whole crowd understood them in their various languages, presents the Pentecost event as a reversal of the confusion at the Tower of Babel in Gen 11:1-9. The people at Babel who spoke one language no longer understood themselves, while at Pentecost, people of many languages understood the apostles. Therefore, the Holy Spirit began to make a new creation, a new people for God, making the disciples effective witnesses for Christ while making the visitors understand the Good news in their languages.

St. Paul, therefore, exhorts us in the second reading (Galatians 5:16-25) to “live by the spirit and walk by the spirit.” When we live and walk by the Spirit, we are filled with the Spirit, and by this, we shun worldly and sinful ways of life by avoiding the works of the flesh. The works of the flesh include “fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing.” These correspond to the sins mentioned in the Ten Commandments such as “you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife and property (Exodus 20:13-14 and Deuteronomy 5:17-18).

Instead, when we live and walk by the Spirit, we walk not as we desire but inspired. By that, we will bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Hence, the Pentecost event indicates a new beginning, the fulfilment of Jesus’ promises, the reversal of past punishments, the beginning of the Church, and the beginning of new life in the Spirit. May this Pentecost transform our lives anew and fill us with the strength and grace to be worthy ambassadors and effective witnesses of Christ to the world.

I wish you and your family a very Happy Solemnity of Pentecost.