

Pentecost Sunday 2020

Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104; 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13; Jn 20:19-23

Today is the celebration of Pentecost which is considered the birthday of the Church. Thus, Happy Birthday Church is in order.

Pentecost (Greek for *50th*) is celebrated by the church 50 days after Easter, and marks the day the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles and many who were gathered in Jerusalem.

In Jewish tradition, Pentecost refers to the festival celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover, also known as the "Feast of Weeks."

It was while the Jewish people were in Jerusalem for Pentecost that God sent the power and gift of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. After receiving the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, the apostles immediately went out and preached the Good News of Jesus. We are told in Scripture that 3,000 souls were baptized that day and the Church was born.

Happy Birthday Church!

Having a birthday during this pandemic has been a unique experience for many. We have had 5 Zoom birthday parties in our family. However, we did not get the memo that birthday candles were no longer considered safe due to the spreading of germs while blowing out candles.

One news outlet reported, "With the Coronavirus and the spread of germs, is the tradition of blowing out candles now a thing of the past?"

"To demonstrate the potential to contaminate cakes, Insider Edition conducted a demonstration with an ultraviolet light. Using a non-toxic fluorescent powder, Diane McInerney blew out candles, showing how potential germs might be spread." The article went on to say, "Since COVID-19 is likely spread mainly through small droplets, you might want to consider some alternative ways of blowing out candles without spreading germs, such as melting the bottom of candles and securing them to a plastic cover on top of the cake or waving your hands over it. NBC Nightly News anchor Lester Holt and his grandson recently struggled to try to "clap out" the candles." You can also wave a dish towel.

Strange times!

In our Gospel lesson from John's Gospel, we are told that Jesus, "Breathed on the disciples and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" As much as we are aware of our breath and do not want others to breath on us (Wearing masks points to this reality), Pentecost is not about our germs or our breath. Pentecost is about the breath of God, the Spirit of God being poured out over us, in us and through us.

Pentecost is God sending His Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, into our very beings to comfort us, empower us, enliven us, guide us, instruct us, gift us, love us, and point us to Jesus.

The Hebrew and Greek words for "Spirit" also mean breath or wind. In the book of Acts, our first reading, we are told, "The sound of a great wind filled the place where they were." In addition, fire appeared, separated, and rested on each of those present. Wind and Fire are two powerful images of the Holy Spirit.

I may be pushing the analogy of birthday candles too far, but in Icons of Pentecost the saints are often pictured like burning birthday candles with fire on top of their heads. Where the analogy ends is that God does not wish to blow out the candles, but wishes to kindle the flame of the Holy Spirit within us. God's breath does not blow the fire out, God's breath ignites the fire, blows the fire in.

The breath and the fire are one. Like blowing on embers in a bonfire or wood stove, God's breath is the Holy Spirit and inflames the Holy Spirit within us. The goal is not to extinguish the flames, but to have the fire of the Holy Spirit consume us and empower us to be filled with the very life and love of God. In this way, the Holy Spirit calls us and enables us to be the best versions of ourselves and to be the Church, the Body of Christ.

Do you know you have the Holy Spirit within you? Paul says in our second reading, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit." If you can say in your heart that "Jesus is Lord" you have the Holy Spirit. In addition, by the very nature of your baptism and confirmation the Holy Spirit came upon you and is in you.

Pentecost reminds us we are Spirit-filled Christians. We are called to live not by our own might, not by our own power, but by the very power and gift of the Holy Spirit. There are no exceptions. All Christians are given the Holy Spirit. Thus, each of us is called to receive the Holy Spirit and cooperate with the Holy Spirit's gifting in our lives.

I have heard it said that Covid-19 is causing our world, our nation, and our individual lives to "Reset" or "Reboot". I remember when one of our first internet routers wasn't working correctly. I called the phone company and they recommended that I unplug the device, wait two minutes, and then plug it back in. Surprisingly, it worked. The same strategy has worked with many routers as well

as my iPhone. When my phone is acting up, I just turn it off, wait a few minutes and turn it back on.

In our current COVID-19 “reboot”, we have unplugged many of our daily activities and we have been waiting. Now, we are eager to plug back in. The question is: where or to what do we plug into? Do we plug into the same power and plug-ins we have used before. Do we plug into the same activities, or is there something more? Is God calling us to a deeper relationship, a more intimate connection in and through God’s very Spirit?

I want to suggest that Pentecost invites us not so much to plug into something as it is calling us to receive something, God’s very Spirit. To “plug-in” gives the impression that we need to do something. However, Pentecost is first and foremost about God, not about what we do or do not do. God gave the Holy Spirit and the believers received. Before they did anything, they simply received. In fact, it was in the receiving that they were able to act. In receiving the Holy Spirit they were able to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. God did the breathing. God caused the powerful wind to blow. God produced the fire that rested on the apostles. God gives the Holy Spirit, God gives the gifts, we are called to receive. Again, after breathing on his disciples Jesus said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

I know I need to receive more and more of the Holy Spirit. I know too often I have lived by my own power, my own thoughts, my own desires, my own pettiness.

Maybe this “Reboot” is giving us the time and space we need to receive the Holy Spirit in ways we have never received before.

In receiving the Holy Spirit, we are receiving God. We are receiving God’s presence, God’s compassion, God’s encouragement, God’s advocacy, God’s love. In receiving the Holy Spirit, we are receiving God’s gifts.

Once we receive wholeheartedly the Holy Spirit, we will more readily and willingly plug into the Holy Spirit. To plug into the Holy Spirit is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit’s presence and power in our lives and embrace the gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit.

After receiving the Holy Spirit, we are told in Acts that the devout Jews began to speak in other languages allowing those present to understand each other and hear of the mighty acts of God. They received the Holy Spirit and plugged into the Holy Spirit by sharing the gifts that each were given.

In our second reading, Paul says, “There are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit.” He goes on to say, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common

good.” We have all been given the Holy Spirit and we have all been given gifts of the Holy Spirit for the common good.

If you know the gifts of the Spirit God has given you, I encourage you to cooperate with the Holy Spirit by using and sharing those gifts for God’s glory, the building up of the Body of Christ, the Church, and to be the best version of yourself. Also, keep growing and receiving more and more the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

If you are unsure of the gifts the Holy Spirit has given you, I invite you to keep receiving, keep trusting the Holy Spirit in your life and seek, with God’s help, to plug into the Holy Spirit. One primary way to plug into the Spirit is through prayer, asking God to help you receive the Holy Spirit. The simple prayer, “Come, Holy Spirit”, is pleasing to God. Also, ask God to help you foster and grow the fruit of the Spirit in your life. Paul says in Galatians, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Fostering this fruit will help the world and will help you discover the gifts of the Spirit God has given you.

How desperate our nation and world are to experience Pentecost. How desperately does our world and nation need the Body of Christ to receive the Holy Spirit and bear the fruit of the Spirit.

We have each been given gifts of the Holy Spirit for the common good. May we receive the Holy Spirit and cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that more and more people might come to know the saving love and forgiveness of Jesus and join the Body of Christ.

Happy Birthday Church!

I will pray for you and I ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve
