

Pentecost
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✧ Jesu juva ✧

THE MIRACLE OF PENTECOST NOW

Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-11; John 14:23-31

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Pentecost is one of the two most ancient feasts of the Church. It's roots are in the Old Testament Feast of Weeks, which in Greek was called Pentecost, for the 50th day after Passover. This Feast was a feast celebrating the harvest of the firstfruits of the years labors in the fields, which may seem out of place here in Minnesota where we have at long last just emerged from winter. Nevertheless, in Judea they were already bringing in their first harvests of the year at Passover and were now bringing the harvesting of those first crops to a completion. Traditionally the Rabbis also used the feast to commemorate the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai some fifty days after the Exodus, and so the feast came to celebrate the gifts of God to His people both for their physical needs and for their spiritual needs.

It was one of three pilgrimage feasts in ancient Israel, when every man was required to come to Jerusalem and make his offerings to the Lord. Although by the time of Christ the people of Israel and Judah had long since been scattered across the face of the earth, still many travelled back to Jerusalem for this great feast. Evidently Jerusalem was customarily filled with these pilgrims at Pentecost. On one occasion a few years after the events recorded in Acts, there was a revolt against the Romans at the time of this Feast which included men from all around the region. It was not strange, then, that at Pentecost there would be "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs," as St. Luke tells us.

And this is where we find the apostles too on that fiftieth day after the Passover, which was also the fiftieth day of Christ's resurrection. They are there in Jerusalem waiting, just as Jesus at His ascension had told them to do, to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. St. Luke tells us: "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." What an extraordinary thing! Not that they happened to be together in one place, but that they were all there with one accord. It is not often that we find a group of this many people in one place who are all of one mind. And yet they were. They had witnessed Christ's resurrection. For years they had heard His teaching and witnessed His miraculous works. But now after the resurrection it all had come together for them. At last, through Christ's appearing to them and through the teaching He imparted to them those forty days after the resurrection, their faith was made firm. They understood the Gospel. And, by the grace of God at work in the word they had received, they were completely unified in it.

And so when that mighty rushing wind comes down to them with a roar from heaven and the tongues of fire appear over their heads, and they are filled at last with the Holy Spirit and empowered by Him, they go forth in unity, speaking the Gospel with complete unity of proclamation and faith. Though they speak with other tongues, the word they speak is the same Word of God. There is no

division among them wrought by faulty interpretation or the intrusion of reason against that which the Word says. There is one message. And that message is heard by all. And the content of that message is Christ Jesus.

Peter acts as spokesman to the questioning crowds, first explaining that this miracle is the fulfillment of what the prophet, Joel, said. And here in Joel's words we find the purpose of the Pentecost event: "And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." That day had now come to pass with Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. Now the Holy Spirit was going forth by the Word of Christ to create faith in unbelieving hearts throughout the whole world. And it began there in Jerusalem where people from all over the world were gathered for the great pilgrim feast. And through the work of the Spirit that day three thousand were brought to faith. They heard the Word of Christ, of His Gospel, and believed. They had been delivered this Word and now by the grace of the Holy Spirit they kept it and found salvation and fellowship with God. Jesus said: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."

This miracle of Pentecost continues among us now. For the essence of this miracle is not the loud rushing wind or the tongues of fire or the speaking in other languages. The essence of this miracle is the preaching of the Gospel and the faith that is kindled thereby. We prayed in the Gradual today: "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, and kindle in them the fire of Your love." And how was this prayer answered? How is it still being answered? Not by miraculous signs and tongues of fire. It was answered when the Gospel was read. And it is answered now as the Word is being proclaimed. As our Lord said, the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father in the name of Jesus to "teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that [Christ] has said." And He does this work whenever the Word of Christ is preached and taught.

And by this Word He works faith and salvation. By this Word of Christ He brings the peace that Christ promised to His apostles and to all the faithful that day in the upper room. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." And this peace bestowed by Christ's Gospel is first of all peace with God, whose wrath against our sin and rebellion has been appeased by the sacrifice of Christ His Son. Now Christ, having washed us of our sins with His own blood, makes us acceptable to the Father, so that when we have faith, that is when we keep His Word, both Father and Son come to dwell with us in and in us.

And because we are all in Christ and He in us, we ought also to be at peace with one another. And this too is the Spirit's work among us, bringing our faith into action through love of one another, so that like the apostles on that day of Pentecost, we who gather together here in His Church also are found in one place in one accord. That is to say that we are all in the same place spiritually; that we love the same things, the manifold gifts of the Gospel, the Word of Christ, Christ Himself and through Him the Father and the Spirit too; and that we love one another in Christ, as members of His one body and of one another, being gracious to each other and allowing nothing to divide us either in our confession of the faith or in our lives together as the Church of Christ.

That peace is both given and expressed at the Lord's Supper. When I proclaim to you in the Communion Liturgy "The Peace of the Lord be with you always," it is not a vain wish or an idle word. It is a proclamation of the reality that is bestowed upon you in this Sacrament, for here we eat and drink Peace when we take Christ into us in His body and blood. Here sins are forgiven as Jesus has prom-

ised. And here life and salvation are both celebrated and renewed in us. And at this table peace is shared among us as well, whoever we are and wherever we have come from, so long as we are in Christ with one accord, we are one at this table and in this Church.

And so the miracle experienced that first Pentecost after Easter so many years ago, continues among us today. Through the Gospel of Christ, through the Word of Christ and through His sacrament, the Holy Spirit continually does His work of kindling faith and love in our hearts, until the day when this work is brought to completion and our Lord returns. "The Spirit of the Lord fills the world. Alleluia. Let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God; yes, let them rejoice exceedingly!" Amen.

✧ Soli Deo gloria ✧