

Pentecost (Whitsunday) 2024
Sermon - Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Acts 2.1-22 St. John 14.15-31



It's Pentecost! We have two reasons to celebrate. This is the Church's Birthday...and because we are the Church it's our Birthday too. We have also received the best birthday present ever...the Holy Spirit. So let's wish each other a Happy Birthday!

The word *Pentecost* comes from the Greek word *pentekoste* (pen-tay-KOS-tay) and means "fiftieth day". It has its origin in the Jewish harvest festival Shavuot (SHAV-oo-utt) or "weeks", talked about in the Book of Exodus. It was celebrated fifty days (or seven weeks) after the Passover, and was one of the three major Jewish harvest festivals celebrated in Jerusalem. In Jesus' time, Pentecost also celebrated God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai.

The Book of Common Prayer also calls this day Whitsunday and the week following Whitsuntide. The "whit" in Whitsunday refers to the white robes worn by candidates for Holy Baptism. It is still a common practice today, especially for infants and children, to be dressed in white clothes, to celebrate their rebirth by water and the Holy Spirit and to welcome them as members of Christ's Church.

Before he went back to heaven, Jesus promised his disciples he would send the Holy Spirit to enlighten and empower them. Jesus always keeps his promises. Jesus promised when the Holy Spirit came to them he would make all things clear to them. Their enlightenment came in a clear understanding of Jesus and his mission to reconcile all mankind to his Father in heaven. They would be *Apostoloi*...the "sent out ones". They would take the Good News about Jesus to a spiritually hungry world.

Pentecost was a life-changing event for the Apostles and it is for us. The most remarkable change came to Peter. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and preached the most powerful sermon of his life. Some people laughed at him and the other Apostles and accused them of being drunk. Peter replied, "Amethystos", literally "not drunk". The Ancient Greeks believed you would not get drunk if you wore something with an amethyst. Anglican

bishops wear rings set with an amethyst...alluding to the description in today's lesson from Acts of the Apostles as "not being drunk".

Peter spoke to the crowd what the prophet Joel had said 500 years earlier: "...*God says, I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams...and then whoever calls out to the Lord for help will be saved*". Peter told the crowd what they were witnessing was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

Many people responded to Peter's call and believed. They were baptized in Jerusalem and they took the Good News about Jesus back to their own countries so others could hear the message of forgiveness and hope. This was the birthday of the Church. The newly baptized people, filled with the Holy Spirit, spread the Gospel throughout the world. It is our Mission, whether clergy or lay, to continue the work begun by the Apostles and those early missionaries, and spread the Good News about Jesus to the world.

We can only do the work God wants us to do because we have the gift of the Holy Spirit Jesus promised would strengthen us and enable us to do what we are asking in the Collect...to "have right judgment in all things". Having right judgment in all things means we try to do the right things.

Today we thank God for the gift of his Holy Spirit and we remember the words the bishop said when we were confirmed...

...that God will bless us with his grace; that we may continue to be his children forever; and that the Holy Spirit will increase in our lives more and more each day, until we come into his everlasting kingdom.

It's Pentecost! It's the Church's Birthday! It's our Birthday! It's time to open up the greatest birthday present ever and let him go to work in our lives. It's time to celebrate.

Let's wish each other a Happy Birthday!

