

Pentecost (Whitsunday) 2026

Sermon - Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Acts 2.1-22 St. John 14.15-31



Happy Birthday Church! Today is Pentecost...also called Whitsunday... the day on which we traditionally celebrate the birthday of the Church. The word Church is derived from the Greek word *ekklesia*...literally “called out”. Our historic building is not the Church. We are the Church...people who have been called out of the world and into a relationship with God to carry out His mission.

Christianity has its roots in Judaism and the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament). Without Judaism and the Hebrew Bible, the claims Jesus makes to being the Son of God make no sense. Without the Old Testament that talks about the Old Covenant God created with Moses and the people, we cannot understand the New Testament and the New Covenant God has made with us through Jesus.

The word “Pentecost” comes from the Greek word pentecost (pen-TAY-cos-TAY)...meaning “the fiftieth day”. It has its history in the Jewish harvest festival “Shavuot” (SHAV'-oo-utt), or “weeks”, talked about in the Book of Exodus. The festival takes place fifty days, or about seven weeks after Passover and celebrates the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses. Today Shavuot has more meaning to Jews living in Israel than elsewhere in the world.

Whitsunday, or “White Sunday”, gets its name from the white robes worn by those getting ready to be baptized. Easter and Whitsunday were the two days in the early Church when baptisms were held, primarily because lakes and rivers were often too cold or frozen over with ice to make it practical to hold a baptism. Easter and Pentecost remain important days in the Church today for baptisms...when the newly baptized have their re-birthday...as members of the Body of Christ.

In Jesus’ time, Passover-Pentecost was one long festival celebrating Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and God’s gift to the people of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. They would become a nation committed to serving God and he would take care of them. He would be their father and they would be his children.

In the early Church, Easter-Pentecost was one long celebration of the Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus culminating in the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Jesus led us out of slavery to sin and death. By his death on the cross, Jesus has put us back into a right and whole relationship with God our Father. Today we ask God to send the Holy Spirit to give us strength and courage to live as his children and to think and do the right things.

Before he went back to heaven on the Ascension Day, Jesus told his disciples to go back to Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is called by many names. He is *paracletos*...Greek for Advocate, Counselor, Strengthener...the one who comes alongside to help, guide and intercede for us. He is the Spirit of Truth who makes things clear to us. He is the Spirit of God actively present in the world. He is the Spirit of Life...the giver of spiritual and physical life...who lives in our hearts and renews our souls.

The Holy Spirit gave the Apostles the strength and courage to preach the Good News about Jesus Christ to the world. They became the *Apostoloi*...“sent out ones”, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to do God’s work. But it wasn’t their work alone. The many people who were baptized in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost took the Good News back to their own countries. They became Church...those who were called out of the world to be missionaries to the world.

Jesus tells us that if we love him we will keep his commandments. A commandment is something we must do...it isn’t a suggestion or an option. Jesus tells us to love one another just as much as he loves us. He promised his disciples they would not have to go it alone in their work. They would get help from the Holy Spirit.

Today we ask God to empower us too with his Holy Spirit so we too will have the strength and courage to always think and do the right things and to live as his children. Jesus has promised us with the Holy Spirit...the Holy Helper...we won’t have to do our work alone either.

This is the Church’s birthday. We have been the greatest gift...the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts. Let’s wish each other a Happy New Birthday...reborn and empowered to show the love of Christ to the world.

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