

PENTECOST/WHITSUNDAY 2015
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
ACTS 2.1 St. JOHN 14.15



God's good gift and most perfect present has arrived...with the sound of a strong wind blowing...we have not been left alone...Jesus promised he would send a Helper when he went back to heaven.

The Feast of Pentecost ranks right up there with Christmas and Easter as one of the principle festivals of the Church Year. Pentecost is the Church's birthday...the celebration of our empowerment by the Holy Spirit...so let 's take time today to wish each other...Happy Birthday!

The Greek word *Paracletus...Paraclete...* is another name for the Holy Spirit...the Helper Jesus said he would send. Paraclete means "one who consoles, comforts, encourages, uplifts, refreshes, strengthens; and one who intercedes on our behalf like an advocate in a courtroom." The Holy Spirit does all this...and much more...when we open our hearts and let him go to work.

The word *Pentecost* means *fiftieth day*. According to Jewish tradition, Pentecost commemorates God giving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai fifty days after the Exodus. It was also the common name for the Jewish spring harvest festival called the Feast of Weeks talked about in Exodus and Deuteronomy and marks the conclusion of the Jewish Passover season.

The Church has continued to use the name Pentecost because we are now fifty days after Easter Sunday and the Christian Passover. The less-common name *Whitsunday...White Sunday...* refers to the custom of candidates getting ready for baptism on this day wearing white robes...symbolizing purity and the beginning of new life in Jesus.

Acts describes the arrival of the Holy Spirit as "a noise from the sky that sounded like a strong wind blowing". We have been hearing a lot recently about unusually strong tornados wreaking havoc in Oklahoma and Texas. Anyone who has lived in that part of the country knows what an F2 tornado is capable of doing.

The strong wind blowing that is God's Holy Spirit refreshes and empowers us. His strong wind is the character building breath of life that keeps us on course...and he brings powerful and positive changes to our lives.

About 500 years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Joel wrote God will pour out his Spirit on everyone. Our sons and daughters will proclaim his message. Young men will see visions...old men will have dreams...and then whoever calls out to the Lord for help will be saved.

After the Ascension, the Apostles and Mary and others were confused by what they had witnessed and waited for what was next. That all changed with the arrival of the Holy Spirit...the strong wind blowing that changed their lives and our lives forever. Perhaps the most remarkable change was in Peter...who speaks boldly to the crowd when he and the others are accused of being drunk. "We are not drunk", he says. "Listen up...I have something to say...pay attention".

No longer the coward, Peter speaks bravely and says that what people are seeing is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. God's plan to reconcile all humankind to himself was accomplished through the life, death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. It is Peter's finest hour...his most powerful sermon...and it changed the lives of thousands of people who were baptized the same day.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells us if we love him we will keep his commandments. His commandment to love is not a suggestion and there is no opt-out clause. Jesus tells us to love God and love one another just as much as he loves us. And he sent us the Holy Spirit to help us so we don't have to go it alone.

Let us thank God for the best gift and most perfect birthday present ever...remembering the words the bishop says at a Confirmation: *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.*

And let's not forget to wish each other...Happy Birthday!

