

PENTECOST 2016
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
ACTS 2.1 JOHN 14.15



AMONG THE MANY STARTLING THINGS I HEARD IN YEARS GROWING UP IN SAINT ALBAN'S PARISH IS TODAY'S 'THEME SONG' HAPPY BIRTHDAY CHURCH...! Not that I comprehended it, I was taught Pentecost is commonly identified as **the birthday of the Church**. Along with others, it seemed to me a bit startling.

Now older – perhaps even wiser – I've come to understand it's more than just a trite or clever description...there is real substance. Let's consider further...

Pentecost is about fire...fire that God used to get the attention of the Apostles and get them moving...and it worked! God showed up in a definitive way...this time as fire...the same fire in a different form that captivated Moses...the burning bush...

But what does that have to do with this being a birthday...? We normally think of a birthday as the anniversary of one's birth...more often than not a cake shows up blazing with candles...hmmm...fire!

Birthday candles - light...fire...warmth...comfort... use your imagination for a moment - consider the last time you encountered a birthday cake ablaze with those candles that you can't blow out...no matter what you do they keep coming back!

Now we should have a whole new perspective on Pentecost...the **birth day** of the Church when a fire started that has burned for two thousand years. In every one of those two thousand years someone has been trying to put the fire out...from the Romans to the Vandals, Nazis, the Marxists, the Taliban, now ISIS...and the secularists in our midst...just like those birthday candles...the fire that God started on Pentecost continues to burn...it cannot be put out!

Before Jesus ascended to Heaven he told the Apostles, "Don't leave town – I'll send help." They had not a clue what he was talking about. More was about to happen...

Pentecost is the day of their answer. Along with a lot of other people who believed and followed Jesus they were all together in

Jerusalem...God arrived with a great wind and fire from the sky. The Apostles were given the ability to speak other languages so they could communicate with **ALL** people ...**NOT** the formation of an exclusive group with an unknown language.

There ensued such a commotion people gathered to see what was going on...there were particularly devout and learned Jews in the crowd who sensed that something remarkable was happening.

Others in the crowd jeered and shouted out...these guys are drunk! They wanted to ignore the matter...thought the fire would go out!

Peter, stepped forward and said listen to me...these men are not drunk, it's only nine o'clock in the morning. We are amethysts [αμεσθηισσ] (amethysts) this is what the prophet Joel was talking about...(Acts 2.17)...Peter gave an impassioned speech on the spot...many were baptized and ~3000 followers of Jesus were added that day. The fire burned brightly!

The Holy Spirit had arrived...they now had some idea why Jesus instructed them not to leave town...he promised there was more to come...now they knew what he meant! Pentecost is one of the remarkable days of the Church year in that provides much food for thought. We relate to the confusion those first followers of Jesus must have felt...wondering what would be next. They had doubts and fears...we sometimes have doubts and fears. They wanted to go do something else...we sometimes want to spend our time doing something else. They stayed and waited as Jesus told them to do...we stayed and waited as we were called to do. The Holy Ghost came to give the Apostles new capabilities, comfort and compelled them to act.

The Holy Ghost visits us on this Feast of Pentecost - calls us to action...the birthday cake is in our care! Think about **YOUR PERSONAL** role...what does the Holy Spirit ask of us...God always finds something for us to do...the opportunities are endless

Now, just as the Apostles were visited on the first Pentecost and called into action to establish and build the Church...God calls us to help keep that flame alive...**ALLOW NO ONE TO BLOW OUT THE CANDLES!**

