

PENTECOST (WHITSUNDAY) 2017

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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ACTS 2.1 St. JOHN 14.15



Children love birthdays. When I was a little boy my birthday was a big deal. I awoke with eager anticipation of spending a day filled with food, fun, family and friends. And then there were the presents...some were totally unexpected...more than I could have asked for...surprises that made the birthday all the more special.

Sometimes as we grow in age we tend to outgrow our birthdays...they are just another day in our busy lives...they take on less meaning...they get lost and perhaps forgotten.

Pentecost has long been called the Church's birthday...from the mass outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and the crowd's response recorded in Acts. The birthday connection is not readily apparent from the reading...the real meaning of Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit often gets missed.

The word *Pentecost* means *fiftieth day* and is the old Greek and Latin name for the Jewish Spring Grain Harvest Festival called the "Feast of Weeks" talked about in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Pentecost took place fifty days after Passover and also commemorated God's giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses fifty days after the Exodus.

In the Church Pentecost takes place fifty days after Easter...we remember the words of the Easter Canticle..."Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the Feast." In the earliest days of the Church the Easter Season included Easter, Ascension and Pentecost...one long period of celebration.

About 500 years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Joel wrote, "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."

Pentecost is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy...especially witnessed in the remarkable transformation of Peter...from the coward who ran away at the first sign of trouble...to an effective mouthpiece for Jesus empowered by God's Holy Spirit.

Peter and the other Apostles speak bravely and say to the crowd what we are seeing and hearing is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy God had a plan to reconcile all humankind to himself was accomplished through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Some people couldn't understand how Peter and the other Apostles could be so animated and enthusiastic about what they were saying...and accuse them of being drunk at nine o'clock in the morning. Peter responds, "We are not drunk...listen carefully to what I have to say."

Peter then preaches what is probably the most powerful sermon of his life. And many people listen and respond to what Peter says and believe and get baptized and they take the Good News about Jesus home with them and spread it around...the Church is born and what a birthday it is!

If birthdays are about presents we have been given the perfect present...the Holy Helper himself...as much the unexpected surprise for us as for the Apostles...and the Holy Spirit is not to be kept locked away in a closet.

The Holy Spirit empowers us to be effective agents for Jesus...he teaches our hearts the truth about Jesus...and he helps us to do what we ask for in the Collect...to have right judgment in all things...and to rejoice in the strength he gives us.

Jesus tells us that if we love him we will keep his commandments. A commandment is something we must do; it's not a suggestion or an option. Jesus tells us to love one another just as much as he loves us. Keeping his commandments is part of our work...work we can't do well without the Holy Helper.

Let's remember the words the bishop says at a Confirmation and apply them to our lives: ***God will bless us with your grace; that we may continue to be your children forever; and that the Holy Spirit will increase in our lives more and more each day, until we come into your everlasting kingdom.***

Birthdays are full of surprises. Let's not forget about Pentecost and the Holy Spirit...he is the gift that keeps giving.

