

PENTECOST (WHITSUNDAY) 2020
SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
ACTS 2.1-22 ST. JOHN 14.15-31

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It's our birthday! Yes, Pentecost is the Church's birthday. The Church is the people. So, let's wish each other...Happy Birthday!

The Christian Festival of Pentecost has its roots in the Jewish Festival called by the same name. Pentecost is a Greek word meaning "fiftieth day". For Jews, Pentecost takes place fifty days after Passover...for Christians, fifty days after Easter.

Among Jewish people today Pentecost is more commonly called the "Feast of Weeks". The Festival celebrates both agricultural and spiritual events...it marks the ending of the important wheat harvest and commemorates the day God gave the Torah to the nation of Israel on Mount Sinai.

Pentecost is one of the Three Pilgrimage Festivals within Judaism. The other two are the Passover and the fall harvest festival called the "Feast of Shelters". Jews were expected to travel to Jerusalem for these High Holy Days. Pentecost is also one of the Church's three "must go to Mass" days. The other two are Christmas and Easter.

After Jesus' Ascension into heaven...angels told the Apostles to go back to Jerusalem and wait for further instructions. Jesus told them earlier he would send them a Helper to make all things clear to them and lead them into all truth.

In the Lesson from Acts we join the Apostles at the house where they were gathered. A loud rushing wind suddenly fills the place and tongues of fire touched each person. The Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and started talking in foreign languages.

Acts records a large number of people witnessed the event. They were Jews who lived in Jerusalem and Jews from other countries who spoke many different languages. They all heard the Apostles speak in their native tongues.

Some people were amazed at what they heard...others accused the Apostles of being drunk at 9:00 in the morning. Peter heard the accusation and shouted "amethystos"...we

are not drunk...let me tell you what this means". The amethyst ring a bishop wears is a reminder of what Peter said. Peter the coward and been transformed into Peter the bold by the awesome power of the Holy Spirit. This was the fulfillment of Jesus' promise...he would send them a Helper who would lead them into all truth...and make the truth known to all who would listen and believe. More than 3000 people believed and were baptized.

We sometimes call today "Whitsunday" or "White Sunday"...for the white robes people wore at their baptism. They spent over a year getting ready for their baptisms. It was a life-changing moment. When we are baptized we say we are reborn, or born again, as part of God's family the Church. Our baptisms changed our lives forever.

The message those people heard from the Apostles 2000 years ago is the same message we hear from them today, through the Words of Holy Scripture and through the Sacraments, that strengthen and empower us to be bold ourselves in spreading the Good News about Jesus Christ.

The Good News is Jesus loves us. He tells us that if we love him we will want to keep his commandments. The greatest commandment is to love God with all our hearts, souls and minds. The second greatest commandment is to love our neighbors in the same way we want to be loved. It is not possible to keep one and not the other. Love...as we have learned is an action...always doing what's best for our neighbor, just as God did what was best for us in sending his Son, Jesus, and in sending the Holy Spirit to help us and guide us into all truth.

Because today is the Church's birthday we can celebrate it as our own birthdays too. We can thank God for the gift of his Holy Spirit who helps us keep his commandments and to do the right things. We can thank God for the gift of his Holy Spirit who helps us show his love to others. We can thank God for the gift of his Holy Spirit who helps us say "Thank you, Jesus, for what you have done for us and the whole world".

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

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