

Pentecost/Whitsunday 2021
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney

Acts 2.1-21 St. John 14.15



It's Pentecost...The Helper has arrived just as Jesus promised...and he always keeps his promises. It's also the Church's birthday...two good reasons to celebrate!

The word *Pentecost* means *fiftieth day* in Greek. Jewish tradition teaches Pentecost commemorates God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai fifty days after the Exodus. It is also 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. Whitsunday refers to the white robes worn by candidates for Holy Baptism on this day.

Our Lesson from Acts records the moment The Helper...The Holy Spirit...came down upon the believers who were gathered in one place waiting for what was next. What looked like tongues of fire spread out over them and touched each one. A miraculous change took place. Empowered by the Holy Spirit...the believers were able to speak in other known languages. Visitors from many foreign countries who had stayed in Jerusalem after the Passover to celebrate Pentecost were amazed they could hear Peter and the others speak in their own languages "about the great things God has done!"

The Pentecost story is good up to this point...but we want to hear what happened next. What was the response of all those visitors from foreign countries? What about Peter and the other believers...who were looking out at a skeptical crowd of thousands? What is our response?

Some people in the crowd made fun of Peter and the others...accusing them of being drunk at 9 o'clock in the morning. Peter stood up and responded...*amethytos...we're not drunk...in Greek*. The ancient Greeks wore amethyst jewelry in the belief it would prevent intoxication.

Bishops wear a ring set with an amethyst...a reminder his authority comes from God...but not to become "drunk with power"...and to always focus on the Heavenly Kingdom.

Also...the amethyst is a color found in flames...a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

Peter's conversion was remarkable. No longer Peter the Coward...he was now Peter the Courageous. He didn't back down. He told the crowd they weren't hearing drunk men...they were witnessing the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy written 500 years earlier. God promised he would send out his Spirit on everyone. Their sons and daughters will proclaim his message. Their young men will see visions, and their old men will have dreams...and then whoever calls out to the Lord for help will be saved.

More than three thousand people paid attention to Peter and believed and were baptized...it was the Church's birthday...and its missionary work had just begun. Peter and the others became the *Apostoloi...the sent out ones*...filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to do God's work.

The Apostles work is not something they had to do alone. We share in their work...clergy and laypeople alike...to do with whatever gifts the Helper...the Holy Spirit empowers us with. Like Peter, we cannot back down from that work. We forge ahead...regardless of the obstacles we encounter.

Jesus promised he would not leave us alone and without help when he went back to heaven. His gift of the Holy Spirit is the most perfect birthday gift because He is the gift that keeps on giving. He is the one the Collect says teaches our hearts, enlightens us, and enables us to have right judgment, not only in what we think...but in what we say and do.

Let us thank God for the gift of his Holy Helper, the Holy Spirit and remind ourselves of the words the Bishop said as he laid hands on us 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.

Today we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit and our common birthday...the Church's birthday...so let us wish each other...Happy Birthday!

