

Pentecost (Whitsunday) 2023

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Acts 2.1-11

St. John 14.15-31

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Let me be the first to wish everyone Happy Birthday! Pentecost is regarded as the Church's Birthday...and the start of its mission to the world. This is the day we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles.

Each of us have our own birthdays...we celebrate them every year. When we were baptized...we received the gift of God's Holy Spirit and were "born again" by Water and the Holy Spirit. We began our new lives as members of the Church...the Body of Christ.

Many of us receive birthday presents from our family and friends to help us commemorate the event. They are showing us they love us. God loves us more than we can imagine. His gift of the Holy Spirit is the best birthday present ever. The Holy Spirit never stops working...he is the gift that keeps on giving...and giving...and giving.

We call today the Church's Birthday because of the life-changing event that took place on that first Pentecost over two thousand years ago. Jesus promised the Apostles when the Holy Spirit came to them he would make all things clear to them. They would finally understand it was Jesus' mission to reconcile mankind to his Father in heaven. The Holy Spirit gave the Apostles the strength and courage to carry out their mission to preach the Good News about Jesus Christ to the world.

Perhaps the most remarkable conversion on that first Pentecost was in Peter himself...and it changed his life forever. He was no longer the coward who ran away from Jesus when things got scary the night Jesus was arrested. He got up and preached the most powerful sermon of his life...and he didn't back down when some people laughed at him and the other Apostles.

Peter talked about what the prophet Joel had had written 500 years earlier...

*...“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”.*

Peter went on to tell the people they were seeing Joel's prophecy come true right in front of their eyes. God's plan was to reconcile all mankind to himself through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This was not news the Apostles could keep to themselves. Peter's sermon was so convincing thousands of people were baptized and took the Good News about Jesus back to their own countries. The Church and her mission had begun.

The gift of the Holy Spirit we received at our baptisms changed our lives forever. He makes all things clear to us. He empowers us and gives us the courage we need to spread the Good News about Jesus to the world. Our own missions begins when we ask God to do what we are asking for in the Collect...reorient our hearts to have right judgment in all things. We must then take action and do the right things.

We can only accomplish the work God has given us because the Holy Spirit has empowered us to do that work. Our work must be a labor of love. Jesus tells us that if we love him we will keep his commandments. Jesus tells us to love one another just as much as he loves us. The strength we get to love God above all else and love our neighbors as God loves us comes from the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised us he would not leave us alone and without help when he went back to heaven. His gift of the Holy Spirit strengthens us and helps us do God's work with happiness, joy and peace.

Let us thank God for the gift of his Holy Spirit and ask in the words the bishop uses 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 is Pentecost. It's the Church's Birthday. It's our birthday. Happy birthday to us! Let's celebrate!

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