

In our catechism class we might have all heard about 7 gifts of Holy Spirit - wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. This is a story about how a priest got the gift of knowledge.

This man went to the priest and said, "Father, I want you to say a Mass for my dog." The priest was indignant. "What do you mean, say a Mass for your dog?" "It's my pet dog," said the man. "I loved that dog very much and I'd like you to offer a Mass for him." "We don't offer Masses for dogs here," the priest said. "You might try the denomination down the street. Ask them if they have a service for you." As the man was leaving, the priest overheard him mumbling, "I really loved that dog. I was planning to give a five-thousand-dollar stipend for the Mass." Hearing this the priest got the gift of knowledge and said now very politely, "Wait a minute Sir! Why didn't you tell me that your dog was Catholic dog ?!"

You be the judge whether this was a gift of the Holy spirit or a gift of a dollar?

This Sunday, both the Jews and the Christians are celebrating Pentecost. Pentecost literally means 50 in Greek language. Jews celebrated this feast of Pentecost which is called Shavuot in Hebrew on the 50th Day after the feast of Passover. For Jews it was basically a harvest festival and Along with the Feast of the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, Pentecost was one of the major feasts of the Jews. During these three great Jewish festivals, every male Jew living within twenty miles of Jerusalem was legally bound to go to Jerusalem to participate in the feast. every male Jew was required to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for this feast at least once in a life time. Hence, we see large crowds in Jerusalem and people speaking different languages. And it was on this Jewish Pentecost day, the Holy Spirit came on the disciples of Jesus. Hence, Christians also celebrate the feast of Pentecost on the 50th day after the feast of the Resurrection of Jesus.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended with power upon the Apostles in the image of tongues of fire and thus began the mission of the Church in the world. Once they received the Spirit, they went out boldly and preached to all in Jerusalem and elsewhere. Jesus himself prepared the Eleven for this mission, appearing to them on many occasions after his Resurrection. Prior to his Ascension into Heaven, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father; that is, he asked them to stay together to prepare themselves to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. All the disciples gathered in prayer with Mary in the Upper Room, awaiting the promised event.

Pentecost also is the celebration of birthday of the Church. It is a day on which the followers of Christ were infused with Holy Spirit and strengthened to teach, preach, and live the Christian faith. And as they preached, we heard more than 3000 received baptism.

In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles we have the narrative of the arriving of the Spirit on the Apostles. These timid people are transformed as they receive the power from the Spirit to and preach publicly about Jesus. The first manifestation of their reception of the Holy Spirit came immediately, as the formerly timid, frightened apostles burst out of doors and began to proclaim the Good News of Jesus! Then, everyone there (regardless of their many different native languages), was able to understand the Apostles' proclamation of the Good News of the salvation of mankind, "in *his own tongue*." The Jews in the crowds came from sixteen different geographical regions the miracle of tongues on Pentecost thus reverses the confusion of tongues wrought by God at the Tower of Babel, as described in Genesis 11.

This "anointing by the Holy Spirit" also strengthened the early Christian martyrs during the period of brutal persecution that followed, as it has done through the centuries and as it does today for the thousands of Christians presently under attack for their Faith who hold fast to it, drawing on the Power of the Holy Spirit as they live and as they die.

Today's Gospel relates how the Risen Jesus gave his apostles a foretaste of Pentecost on the evening of Easter Sunday by appearing to them, sending them to carry on the mission given to Jesus by his Heavenly Father, then empowering them to do so by breathing upon them and saying, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*"

Today's Gospel passage also tells us how Jesus gave to the Apostles the power and authority to forgive sins. "*Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.*"

These wonderful words, which bind together inseparably the presence of the Holy Spirit *with* the gift of forgiveness, are referred to directly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

We receive the Holy Spirit during the sacrament of Baptism and during the sacrament of confirmation. So, all of us share the same mission of Jesus given to the Apostles. But have most of us might have kept this Holy Spirit in sleeping mode? It is about time we activate the Holy Spirit or allow it to work in us, so that we can bear the fruits. We can become fearless witnesses of our faith even if it requires martyrdom. Is anyone present here willing and ready to die if persecution broke now?