

Pentecost, Year C

This is the Birthday of the universal Church.⁷ It is also the event remembered in the Third Glorious Mystery of the Rosary.

Acts 2:1-11

While the term "Holy Spirit" occurs only four or five times in Mark and Matthew, it appears thirteen times in Luke and forty-one times in Acts!¹¹

1When the time for Pentecost This was one of three major traditional Jewish feasts that required the adult men of Israel to travel to Jerusalem.⁴ What started out as a harvest festival, over time had become a celebration of the Torah given to Israel on Mt. Sinai, an event also accompanied by wind and fire and the descent of the Spirit on the 70 elders.² The year that Jesus died, Pentecost fell on Sunday, May 29⁶ **was fulfilled, they** This included the apostles, the Blessed Mother, and other disciples that grew in number to 120 during the ten days between the Ascension and the feast of Pentecost. (Acts 1:13-15) Vatican II describes Mary's prayer in these days as a petition for the whole Church to receive the same Holy Spirit that already overshadowed her at the Annunciation. With Mary's "yes" at the Annunciation, the Holy Spirit conceived the physical body of Christ in her womb. Now, with Mary's prayerful intercession at Pentecost, the same Spirit descends upon the apostles to form the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church.¹² **were all in one place together.** A fascinating part of the historical record is that the first Christian church structure, standing on Mount Zion, survived the siege and destruction of the Holy City in 70 A.D. According to tradition, this upper room was the place where Jesus instituted the Eucharist and the spot where the Spirit descended on Pentecost. It was the place where Christians were first nourished for the imminent famine and where they were sealed by the Spirit for safety before the destruction of Jerusalem. This little church of God was preserved from the otherwise total destruction of the ancient city.¹

2And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Just before giving the Ten Commandments, the Lord descended on Mt. Sinai in the form of fire. This was accompanied by the loud sound of a trumpet blast and God's speaking to Moses in thunder. At least one strand of Jewish tradition describes God communicating to the Israelites at Sinai through fire in a language familiar to the people. Commenting on this scene, Philo of Alexandria, a first-century Jewish writer, said: "And a voice sounded forth out of the midst of the fire which had flowed from heaven, a most marvelous and awful voice, the flame being endowed with articulate speech in a language familiar to the hearers, which expressed its words with such clearness and distinctness that the people seemed rather to be seeing than hearing it." This seems to parallel what happens when the Holy Spirit comes upon the apostles in Jerusalem on Pentecost. Just as the old covenant was established at Sinai about a month and a half after the first Passover lambs were sacrificed in Egypt, so now the new covenant is established with the Church about a month and a half after the true Passover Lamb was sacrificed on the cross. And just as God descended on Mount Sinai in the form of fire, with a loud sound and with divine speech familiar to the people, so now God's Holy Spirit descends on the mountain of Jerusalem with the extraordinary signs of fire, a loud sound, and miraculous speech that is understood by people of different languages. The descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost marks another turning point in salvation history, the birth of the new covenant people of God, the Church.¹²

³Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, St. John Chrysostom explains that separate tongues of fire came down on each of them: they were “separated, which means they came from one and the same source, to show that the Power all comes from the Paraclete.”⁵ which parted and came to rest on each one of them. Fire symbolizes the TRANSFORMING ENERGY of the Holy Spirit’s actions. The prayer of the prophet Elijah, who “arose like fire” and whose word “burned like a torch,” brought down fire from heaven on the sacrifice on Mount Carmel. This event was a “figure” of the fire of the Holy Spirit, who transforms what he touches. John the Baptist, who goes “before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah” proclaims Christ as the one who “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” Jesus will say of the Spirit: “I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!” In the form of tongues “as of fire,” the Holy Spirit rests on the disciples on the morning of Pentecost and fills them with Himself. The spiritual tradition has retained this symbolism of fire as one of the most expressive images of the Holy Spirit’s actions. “Do not quench the Spirit.”³ (CCC 696) ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit Here is the fulfillment of the promise made by Jesus.¹⁰ While the old law was written by the finger of God on tablets of stone, the new law is written by God’s Holy Spirit on the hearts of believers, prompting them to love as Christ loved, turning them away from sin, and giving them the power to fulfill the law, which they could not keep on their own.¹² and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them The Spirit Himself directed each one’s speech. to proclaim. The Spirit cannot be known to have been poured *in* unless it somehow pours *out*.¹¹ These first four verses describe the event and the next seven verses tell about the reaction to it.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. There were Jewish pilgrims from every land of the Diaspora (scattered colonies of Jews who fled Palestine at the time of the Babylonian exile) who were staying in Jerusalem. Some of them had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost,¹³ and others had once again become residents in the Holy City to be near the Temple.⁵ They recognized with amazement the tongues of their Diaspora homes.¹³

⁶At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

⁷They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, “Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? This was an early name for Christians. Jesus and all of the Apostles except Judas Iscariot (who was from Judea) were from the area of Galilee.⁶

⁸Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? This event reverses what happened at the Tower of Babel in the book of Genesis. Whereas the people who built the Tower in prideful disobedience had their one language split into many, the people who experience the coming of the Spirit see their many languages made intelligible to all. The coming of the Holy Spirit is a unifying force that binds all peoples together.²

⁹We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, These three were from the area of Iran and Iraq.⁷ inhabitants of Mesopotamia, The land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers.⁷ Judea The southern section of Israel.⁷ and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, These last five were locations in Asia Minor.⁷ Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, These two were North African coastal territories.⁷ as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism,

¹¹Cretans and Arabs, These two locations were thrown in for good measure so that there is a fulfillment of Is. 66:18: “I come to gather nations of every language.” The various nations listed basically form an arc moving from East to West, ending at Rome, whose empire Luke seems to see as the end of the earth.⁸ yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.” By nightfall, no less than 3000 of the pilgrims had been baptized in the name of the Father, of the

Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The Church had grown thirty-fold in a single day. With the convert pilgrims' return home, the worldwide expansion of the Church began. (Acts 2:41)

1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

The Corinthians had consulted St. Paul about the relative value of the gifts of the Holy Spirit—the charisms—which were a marked feature of the Corinthian Church. There was apparently a tendency at Corinth to regard the rather sensational gift of tongues as more important and desirable than other charisms. An attitude of comparing and classifying charisms had arisen which was leading to jealousies and feuds. St. Paul shows here that all the gifts have a single source and that none of them has been given for the profit or advancement of any recipient of the gifts. They are all products of the Holy Spirit's activity and they are given for the common good.¹⁵

Brothers and sisters:

3No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. This is a general principle for discerning signs of the Holy Spirit—recognition that Jesus is Lord. The gifts of the Holy Spirit can never go against the teachings of the Church. Those who have charge over the Church should judge the genuineness and proper use of these gifts, not to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good.¹⁴ The title "Lord" indicates divine sovereignty. To confess or invoke Jesus as Lord is to believe in his divinity.³ (CCC 455) To be in touch with Christ, we must first have been touched by the Holy Spirit.³ (CCC 683) Every time that we begin to pray to Jesus it is the Holy Spirit who draws us on the way of prayer. Since He teaches us to pray by recalling Christ, the Church invites us to call upon the Holy Spirit EVERY DAY, especially at the beginning and the end of EVERY important action.³ (CCC 2670)

4There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; Whatever the character of the gift, ordinary or extraordinary, they are all at the service of charity which builds up the Church.³ (CCC 2003)

5there are different forms of service but the same Lord;

6there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. Note the emphasis on the unity of the Trinity: Spirit in 4, Lord in 5, and God in 6. These are not graces that are distinct from one another, but rather, there are different perspectives from which they can be viewed. Insofar as the gifts are gratuitously bestowed, they are attributed to the Holy Spirit. As they are granted for the benefit and service of the other members of the Church, they are attributed to Christ the Lord and insofar as they are operative and produce a good effect, they are attributed to God the Father.¹⁴

7To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. The gifts are not distributed according to individual merit, but according to the will of the Spirit. The greater gifts are not necessarily the most dazzling. The greater gifts are those which best serve the needs of the community.¹⁵ Note that while the gifts are bestowed for the benefit of others, they also benefit the individual who has them for they are a visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

12As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. This is the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ for just as the body and the head are one man, so too Christ and the Church are one.³ (CCC 791) This connection among members of the Mystical body of Christ applies not only to those on earth (the Church Militant), but also to those in Heaven (the Church Triumphant) and in Purgatory (the Church Suffering), a connection that Catholics refer to as the Communion of Saints.¹⁶ (CCC 225)

13For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink Given that the Apostle says this immediately after mentioning Baptism, he seems to be referring to a further outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is not

uncommon for Sacred Scripture to compare the outpouring of the Spirit to drink, indicating that the effects of His presence are to revive the parched soul.¹⁴ of one Spirit. All true charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them and by all members of the Church as well, for they are a rich grace for apostolic outreach and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ.³ (CCC 800)

John 14:15-16, 23b-26

Part of this Gospel was read on the 6th Sunday of Easter. Once again we return to the words Jesus spoke at the Last Supper. Now we read them in the light of all we have celebrated since Holy Thursday and they have even greater meaning.²

Jesus said to his disciples:

15“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Keeping the commandments is both the cause and the effect of loving Jesus. Love is the challenge, the method, and the reward. To keep the commandments of Jesus is identical with loving him. Loving Jesus is identical with keeping his commandments.² Our commitment to Christ is proved by works and not merely by words.¹⁷ Now the question is, “What are his commandments?” Luke 10:27 says: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” 2John 5-6 says: “Let us love one another. This love involves our walking according to the commandments...” Then we come to chapters 5-7 in Matthew, the Sermon on the Mountain, which fleshes out the life that Jesus is calling us to live. The Beatitudes turn the normal ways of the world upside down! Jesus goes on to tell us that the old commandment was that “You shall not commit murder.” Then he tells us that, “Everyone who grows angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment and any man who uses abusive language toward his brother shall be answerable to the Sanhedrin!” His other commandments are things like: “Settle with your opponent while on your way to court with him!” “Anyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his thoughts!” “Do not swear at all.” “Offer no resistance to injury!” “Love your enemies, pray for your persecutors!” What was external law, is now internal action. What was once a negative prohibition, is now a positive command of action. The law has not been changed. The coin has only been flipped from the “letter-side” to the “spirit-side” of the Law. Then 1John 2:5-6 says that, “The way we can be sure we are in union with him is for the man who claims to abide in him to conduct himself just as he did!!!”

16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate The Spirit is ANOTHER Advocate because Jesus has been the first.⁹ “Advocate” is sometimes translated as “Paraclete” which is a legal term that signifies “advocate,” “helper,” “mediator.”¹⁹ **to be with you always.** The age of the Church is the era of the Spirit to whom is attributed the divine presence in sanctification and testimony throughout the Church’s life.¹⁹

23Whoever loves me will keep my word, God will make Himself known to the person who loves Him and keeps His commandments.¹⁸ This word is made known to us in the Scriptures. **and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.** Through grace the living presence of the Trinity inhabits the hearts of the faithful. From John’s perspective, God dwells in the saints on earth before the saints dwell in God in heaven.¹⁷ In the Old Testament God promised to dwell in the midst of the people, but here Jesus speaks of a presence of God in each person. St. Paul refers to this presence when he asserts that each of us is a temple of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

²⁴Those who do not love me do not keep my words; It is the lack of love and obedience that keeps people from having this manifestation of God!¹⁹ yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me.

²⁵I have told you this while I am with you.

²⁶The Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything

The Holy Spirit is sent from heaven to complete the teaching ministry of Jesus and give the apostles an accurate understanding of the gospel. The term “you” in this verse is plural. It is thus a promise to guide and instruct the ordained leaders of the Church, here represented by the eleven apostles. It is not a promise that the Spirit will grant every individual Christian supernatural insight into the full meaning of the gospel or the Scriptures.¹⁷ and remind you of all that I told you. Those who lived during the time of Christ and watched him on a daily basis did not understand him or his teaching. The Gospels are the life of Christ as interpreted and explained by the Holy Spirit as he instructed and brought to the memory of the Apostles all that Jesus had taught them according to his promise here in verse 26. It is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that we understand Christ and his life.¹⁹

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “The Lamb’s Supper” by Scott Hahn, (2) “Workbook FOR LECTORS AND GOSPEL READERS: 1995” BY Aelred Rosser, (3) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (4) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles,” (5) “The Navarre Bible: Acts of the Apostles,” (6) “The Founding of Christendom” by Warren H. Carroll, (7) “Dictionary Of The Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (8) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998” by Lawrence E. Mick, (9) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary”, (10) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Acts Of The Apostles” by William S. Kurz, S.J., (11) “Christian Initiation And Baptism In The Holy Spirit” by Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, (12) “The New Rosary In Scripture” by Edward Sri, (13) “The Sunday Epistles And Gospels” by Monsignor Patrick Boylan, (14) “The Navarre Bible: Corinthians,” (15) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians” by Mary Ann Getty, (16) “Catholic Replies 2” by James J. Drummey, (17) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John,” (18) “The Navarre Bible: ST JOHN”, and (19) “Catholic Bible Study: John” by Stephen K. Ray.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.