

## Pentecost- Year A

*Pentecost is the BIRTHDAY OF THE CHURCH!*<sup>16</sup>

### Acts 2:1-11

**1**When the time for Pentecost This was one of three pilgrim feasts that required the adult men of Israel to travel to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple. Those who lived within twenty miles were legally bound to come. What started out as a harvest festival, became over time, a celebration of the Torah given to Israel on Mt. Sinai. For Christians, Pentecost celebrates the new law of the Spirit written on the hearts of believers which surpasses the Law of Moses that was inscribed on stone tablets.<sup>1</sup> **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.<sup>5</sup> **were all in one place together.** This is thought to be the same “upper room” that had been used for the Last Supper just seven weeks before.<sup>5</sup> A fascinating part of the historical record is that this first Christian church structure—standing on Mount Zion—survived the siege and the destruction in A.D. 70. According to tradition, this was the place where Jesus instituted the Eucharist and the spot where the Spirit descended on Pentecost. It was also 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.<sup>14</sup> Mary, who conceived Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit, presides over the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost, when the same Holy Spirit comes down on the disciples and gives life to the mystical body of Christians in unity and charity.<sup>2</sup> On Nov. 21, 1964, Pope Paul VI proclaimed the Blessed Virgin Mary as “Mother of the Church.”

**2**And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. It was the NOISE that filled the house.<sup>3</sup> Revelation without sights and sounds could go undetected!

**3**Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, Fire brings light to the minds of the disciples so they can “see” and understand the teachings of Jesus. It brings warmth to their hearts so love can enter and fear be dispelled enabling them to testify and preach boldly. It also purifies the soul of sin and rids it of clutter.<sup>2</sup> **which parted** The fire which came down on each of them came from the same source, to show that the Power all comes from the Paraclete.<sup>2</sup> **and came to rest on each one of them.** The loud and fiery descent of the Spirit here on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem recalls the loud and fiery descent of Yahweh on Mt. Sinai during the Exodus.<sup>1</sup>

**4**And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit This is the fulfillment of the promise made by Jesus. The Spirit is God’s gift. It is the soul that animates the body of the Christian community. This Spirit directs the missionary efforts of the Church, guides the leadership into truth, and sanctifies (or makes holy) the members through the sacraments.<sup>1</sup> **and began to speak in different tongues,** This means foreign languages and it reminds us of the Tower of Babel where God used multiple languages to confuse and scatter the family of man. Here, the Spirit uses multiple languages to communicate the gospel and gather together the family of God.<sup>1</sup> **as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.** The best part of all this is that Pentecost was NOT an isolated event in the life of the Church for it is STILL HAPPENING today!<sup>2</sup>

**5**Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. These were either Jewish pilgrims who had come from all over to celebrate the feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem,

or Jews from all over who had moved to Jerusalem to study and be near the only Temple that the Jews had.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>6</sup>At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. This is not the same as the gift of “speaking in tongues” which is a gift of the Holy Spirit that allows the person to praise God and speak to him in a language which they themselves do not understand.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>7</sup>They 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 Galilee. Aramaic was the common language of these people. Some may have spoken Greek, which almost everyone in the world spoke at that time for purposes of government and commerce.<sup>4</sup> Note the change in the crowd from “confused” to “astounded” to “amazed.”

<sup>8</sup>Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? Each person in the crowd heard the message in his own language in which he was born.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>9</sup>We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, These were people from Persia and Mesopotamia.<sup>15</sup> Judea These people were locals. and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Cappadocia to Pamphylia are all districts in Asia Minor.<sup>3</sup> Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, These are North African coastal territories.<sup>3</sup> This is more or less a geographical sweep from east to west and gives the impression of universality.<sup>18</sup> as well as travelers from Rome,

<sup>11</sup>both Jews and converts to Judaism, These converts were Gentiles who came over to Judaism, obeyed the Mosaic Law, and were circumcised. Judaism was an active missionary religion in the first century.<sup>3</sup> Cretans, These were people from Crete, an island south of Greece in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>15</sup> and Arabs, This does not refer to the ancestors of today’s Arabs, but Jews from Arabia. Gentiles were not added to the Messianic community until the Samaritans of Chapter 8.<sup>17</sup> As a conclusion to the list it adds the western-most and the eastern-most countries.<sup>18</sup> yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God. The coming of the Holy Spirit binds together all of the peoples with all of their languages from all of the nations of all the world! This is the fulfillment of Isaiah 66:18 “I come to gather nations of every language.” By nightfall, no less than 3000 of the pilgrims had been baptized. (2:41) The Church had grown thirty-fold in a single day!

## 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 so marked a 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. It is foolish, therefore, for any individual to boast of his own charism, or to despise the possessors of other kinds of charisms. Paul is advising the Corinthians about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and how these gifts are to be used to promote the common good.<sup>15</sup>*

Brothers and sisters:

**3b**No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. This does not mean merely making sounds with one’s mouth, but truly believing, and it requires the presence of the Holy Spirit; likewise to curse Jesus is a sure sign of the absence of the Holy Spirit and the likely presence of some other spirit that opposes God.<sup>17</sup> To be in touch with Christ, we must first have been touched by the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup> (CCC 683) 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 to hold fast to what is good.<sup>8</sup> 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 at the end of EVERY important action.<sup>6</sup> (CCC 2670)

**4**There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; All gifts are important. Charity is the true measure of all these special graces called charisms.<sup>6</sup> (CCC 800)

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

**6**there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. The word “Trinity” is never used in the New testament, but the elements which led theologians to develop such a concept are seen in passages like this one.<sup>17</sup> Note the emphasis on the unity of the Trinity: “Spirit” in verse 4, “Lord” in 5 and “God” in 6. These are not graces that are distinct from one another, but rather, these are different perspectives from which the gifts 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.<sup>8</sup>

**7**to each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. Paul apparently considers that a baptized person who would not have received some manifest gift of the Spirit to be an anomaly. Every single Christian possesses a spiritual endowment.<sup>10</sup> These gifts are not for us to hold but for us to share. If we do not share the gifts, then the common good suffers.<sup>18</sup> Note that the gifts are NOT distributed according to individual merit, but according to the will of the Spirit.<sup>19</sup> Catholic teaching distinguishes between sanctifying grace, which imparts the gift of divine sonship and charismatic or ministerial grace which equips the saints for service to others.<sup>7</sup>

**12**As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. Paul points out that the human body needs different parts to perform different functions, all of which benefit the whole. Since the Church is the Body of Christ, it too is formed of many different members which are to work together for the benefit of the whole.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

**13**For 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 the 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.<sup>8</sup> **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.<sup>6</sup> (CCC 800)

## John 20:19-23

**19**On the evening of that first day of the week, The evening of Easter Sunday.<sup>20</sup> when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, These are the religious authorities in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> (CCC 575) The disciples had barricaded themselves in the Upper Room because they were afraid that what had happened to Jesus would happen to them also. After all, they had been his followers.<sup>18</sup> **Jesus came and stood in their midst** The glorified body of Jesus has some new properties for he is not limited by space and time but is able to be present how and when he wills.<sup>6</sup> (CCC 645) and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

**20**When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The point is that Jesus is raised not simply with A body, but with the SAME body that was crucified and died only days earlier. He carries these marks of his earthly sacrifice with him even when he ascends into heaven.<sup>20</sup> **The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.**

**21**Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. This does not refer to worldly peace, which is often procured by violence and is always unstable, but this is a spiritual serenity that comforts us regardless of our outward circumstances.<sup>10</sup> Jesus speaks with words that can produce what they express. He leaves them with a legacy and also makes them a gift of peace which springs from friendship with God.<sup>13</sup> **As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”** This “apostolic succession” structures the whole liturgical life of the Church and it is handed on by the sacrament of Holy Orders.<sup>6</sup> (CCC 1087) Every Catholic bishop can show his line of spiritual descent, that is, who consecrated him, who consecrated his consecrator, and so on, all the way back to the Apostles.<sup>12</sup>

**22**And when he had said this, he breathed on them This anticipates the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost, which will take place 50 days later. God breathes on man only twice in all of Scripture—once in Genesis when he breathes the breath of life into Adam, through whom we were all given life, and again here, at the completion of the New Creation, when he breathes on the Apostles, through whom we all attain new life in Christ. The risen Christ, who alone won our redemption, gave the Apostles the power to raise people from spiritual death which is sin.<sup>12</sup> and said to them, “**Receive the Holy Spirit.** As the Son had been sent in the name of the Father, so the Holy Ghost is sent in the name of the Son. As the Son had come to reveal the Father, so the Holy Spirit comes to explain the mission of Christ and reveal its purposes and consequences.<sup>13</sup>

**23**Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” Only God forgives sins but by his authority Jesus gave this power to men to exercise in his name<sup>6</sup> (CCC 1441) He thus gave them a power exceeding what had formerly belonged to the priests of Israel for not even the High Priest of the Temple had possessed the power to forgive sins! Neither was this power given to angels nor to archangels! It stands to reason that before the apostles could exercise this power over souls, they had to HEAR SINS CONFESSED ALOUD. Otherwise, they could not know what to forgive or retain! It is interesting to look at the early development of the sacrament of reconciliation. In the Old Testament, one had to confess his sin to a priest IN THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM and then offer a lamb or a goat as a sin offering with the help and intercession of a priest. Lay people did this at least once a year during Passover and the priests also did so on the Day of Atonement. But it was not enough for it never forgave the sins! Then Jesus came and pronounced the FORGIVENESS of sins!<sup>11</sup> Confession became an integral part of the early Church. The Didache, which is a compilation of the teachings of the apostles, was written about 48 A.D. and advises: “On the Lord’s Day gather together, break bread, and give thanks, FIRST CONFESSING YOUR SINS SO THAT YOUR SACRIFICE MAY BE PURE.” There is also

the admonition, "THOU SHALT CONFESS THY TRANSGRESSIONS IN THE CHURCH." This same admonition was also mentioned in the Letter of Barnabas written in 70 to 80 A.D. By 107 A.D. Wherever people professed Christ, they confessed their sins to the priests of the Church. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote that, "The mark of the Christian who perseveres is FAITHFULNESS TO CONFESSION." By the second and third centuries after Christ there are numerous mentions of Confession in the writings of the Church Fathers. Although the sacrament has been with us from the day of Jesus' resurrection, it has been practiced in varying ways but it has always involved contrition and confession to a priest who pronounces the words of absolution from the sins and the completion of the works of penance or restitution that he assigns.<sup>11</sup>

*Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles" with Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (2) "The Navarre Bible: Acts Of The Apostles," (3) "The Acts of the Apostles" by Luke Timothy Johnson, (4) "The Acts Of The Apostles" by William Barclay, (5) "The Founding of Christendom" by Warren H. Carroll, (6) "The Catechism of the Catholic Church," (7) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The First and Second Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians" with Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (8) "The Navarre Bible: Corinthians," (9) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (10) "Christian Initiation And Baptism In The Holy Spirit" by Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, (11) "Lord, Have Mercy" by Scott Hahn, (12) "Bible Basics" by Steve Kellmeyer, (13) "The Sunday Epistles And Gospels" by Monsignor Patrick Boylan, (14) "The Lamb's Supper" by Scott Hahn, (15) "Oxford Bible Atlas", (16) "The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (17) "Jewish New Testament Commentary" by David H. Stern, (18) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, (19) "The Collegeville Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians" by Mary Ann Getty, and (20) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of JOHN" with Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch.*

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