

June 5, 2022
Pentecost Sunday

Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11
Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, and 34
Romans 8:8-17
John 14:15-16, 23b-26

Veni Sancte Spiritus, Latin for “Come Holy Spirit,” today we are celebrating one of the more important Feast days of the entire Christian year - the Feast of Pentecost Sunday. Now I want to forewarn you that we will be covering a lot of biblical and theological ground this morning and it will almost be impossible to remember everything I will say, but that’s okay.

One of the goals for this morning’s homily is to historically demonstrate that the catholic faith we hold dear, and the way we worship does indeed have deep historical and theological roots that solidify our faith and practices in the Covenant God made with the Children of Israel.

Traditionally, this Sunday marks the end of the Easter Season and the start again of Ordinary Time. But even more important Pentecost Sunday marks the coming or the manifestation of the Holy Spirit giving life to the Church. Thus, you could say that Pentecost marks the birth date of Christianity.

We have mentioned before the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles the night of the resurrection. Now fast forward 40 days from the Resurrection event to the appearance of Jesus just before He ascended to the Father.

Before He departed, He promised to send the Comforter, the Paraclete to advocate, counsel, correct, guide, and teach all believers concerning the Kingdom of God.

In essence the One He would send would take His place. The Paraclete was not a book, a hand carved codex, or an oral tradition. The nature of the sacred text affirms and confirms that He would send a person, a person who would abide with them.

But before that could happen, God wanted to catch the attention of the people, and so what He did was to link an ancient event with a new spectacular current event consisting of an audible sound of a mighty rushing wind, accompanied with the sight of tongues of fire – one resting upon each of the disciples. Plus, the disciples began speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance, which then led to each person there in the assembled crowd hearing the Word of God in their own language.

Some would say the real miracle was that they each heard the disciples speak about the wonderful works of God in their own native-born language. This phenomenon has led some to suggest the gift could have been called the gift of ears rather than the gift of tongues.

Humor aside, St Luke listed at least 14-16 different regions or languages in his account of the event. No one knows exactly how many languages were heard that morning. The important point is that God miraculously revealed Himself to the people in a manner spoken of by the prophet Joel some 587–630 years earlier that caused them to take heed to the message that would soon follow.

Now it is important to remember that up until that very moment with the tongues of fire, and the hearing of the Word of the Lord in their own native-born languages - the general population had yet

to receive the gift and the power of the Holy Spirit - the promised Comforter.

Thus, when Peter stood up and continued to prophesy or proclaim the Word of the Lord the people listened. He talked to them about the testimony of King David. He told them that Jesus after rising from the dead and having ascended and after being exalted to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this what they now saw and heard. Finally, He proclaimed, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ, which means Anointed One and/or Messiah" (Acts 2:36).

Subsequently, after hearing from St Peter the Word of the Lord, the people were cut to the heart and they asked Peter and the disciples, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Indeed, this is the question all men, women, boys and girls ought to ask, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" To be sure, all people need to realize that they have personally sinned and have fallen short of the Glory of God causing Jesus to be crucified.

And with that humble plea, Peter instructed them - and us today - what needed to happen next. He said, "Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For this promise is to you and your children, and all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call."

In other words, if you want to know the formula for salvation, or even if there is such a formula, in my opinion this instruction would carry the most reasonable weight, "Repent, and let everyone of you

be baptized for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Now here is where the confusion comes for some Christian groups. There are some religious denominations that teach that the gift of the Holy Spirit mentioned here in Acts 2 is the gift of speaking in tongues. I will not argue with anyone that the Holy Spirit is the giver of all good gifts.

But here in the context of this sacred story event, I would postulate that the receiving of the Holy Spirit Peter mentioned is none other than the Holy Spirit himself whom the prophet Joel prophesized, Jesus promised, and St Peter spoke of. As a result of St Peter's message 3,000 people were added to the Kingdom of God, received the Holy Spirit, and they began to carry the same message to the whole known world.

However, and here it is very important to note that this day also held spiritual significance in Jewish history long before the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. It was by no accident that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred during the celebration of a similar world-changing event that happened some fourteen to fifteen hundred years prior to Pentecost.

Pentecost is the New Testament celebration originally understood in the context of the Old Testament Jewish festival named *Shavuot*. During *Shavuot* the Jewish devout commemorate the giving of the *Torah*. For those not familiar with the *Torah*, in its narrowest sense the *Torah* consists of the first five books of the Old Testament, which includes the Ten Commandments as the main focal point; and, in its broadest sense the *Torah* represents the entire body of Jewish religious teaching.

Approximately three thousand five hundred years ago, and after leaving Egypt on the day of Passover, the Jews traveled into the Sinai desert. There the entire Jewish nation, - men, women and children, were summoned to miraculously experience a divine revelation of God when He spoke to them from Mount Sinai.

Moses later reminded the people, “God spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you were hearing the sound of words, but you were not seeing a form, only a sound. He told you of His covenant, instructing you to keep the Ten Commandments, and He inscribed them on two stone tablets” (Deut. 4:12-13).

Jewish sages would say that on that day on Mt Sinai, God and the Children of Israel stood together under a wedding *Chuppah* or canopy, and God asked the people whether or not they would accept the *Torah*, and they said yes. There the people said, “We will listen and we will do.” Understood in a marital context, from that day forth, the people pledged themselves to obey all that God had said and written.

Much like a bride and groom, who on each successive yearly wedding anniversary remember their wedding vows, *Shavuot* is a time to once again commit to receive and obey the Lord God of Israel through the Ten Commandments given to Moses.

There is much more we could share concerning the history and the connection between *Shavuot*, the giving of the Law of Moses, and Pentecost; but first let's address a simple practical question. What of the tongues of fire seen over the disciple's heads? Have you ever wondered why on Pentecost did tongues of fire appear over the disciple's heads?

Biblical scholars suggest that the tongues of fire serve as a historical and supernatural link between the demonstrative Mount Sinai giving of the Law, the Sending of the Comforter, the birth of the Church, and the validation of the doctrine of the Blessed Holy Trinity.

When the Lord God gave the Israelites the Law He did so on Mt Sinai as we have already mentioned. You can read about it in Exodus 19. There the Bible states the mountain was wrapped in smoke and the Lord God came down in the fire and smoke and the whole mountain quaked.

So now on the day of Pentecost it was the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity who descended upon the disciples. Not surprisingly He came in a similar manner as was evidenced on Mount Sinai. Thus He appeared with the sound of a mighty wind, and a visual image of a burning fire, which then parted to form individual tongues of fire resting upon the heads of the disciples.

Herein we witness a new representation of Mount *Sinai*, but this time the writing of the Law of the Spirit was not written on slabs of stone, but it was miraculously inscribed on the tablets of men's hearts.

Thus, in the symbology of God's Pentecostal fiery tongues, we see the cleansing, healing, refiner's fire of the Holy Spirit – hence the mighty wind of God moved or shook the disciples to the point that the crowds suspected that they were drunk with wine and all of it while it was still only 9 am in the morning. Indeed, they were not drunk with wine; but instead they were intoxicated with the fullness of the Spirit.

Going even deeper into Jewish history and Tradition and the giving of the Law, *Shavuot* was also called the *Feast of Weeks*, or the *Feast of Sevens*. Associated within the context of an agricultural festival, all the people were mandated by God to celebrate and give thanks for the "first fruits" of the early spring harvest (Lev 23, Exodus 23, 34).

Seven times seven equals forty nine, and it was 49 days after Passover whereon the day after the forty ninth day called *Shavuot* the men would all make a special pilgrimage to gather at the Temple where they would offer bread and other sacrifices to the Lord.

To the ancient Israelites a successful harvest meant the ability to live one more year with adequate food supplies. Historically speaking food supplies were directly linked to nature; subsequently, the people relied on a symbiotic or interdependent relationship with the earth, which they firmly believed was influenced by the presence of God or the lack there of.

Therefore, the ability to cooperate with God and connect with Him and celebrate the natural rhythms of nature were essential for the survival of the Jewish nation and its culture. As a side note here, we today need to acknowledge the same importance of maintaining a right relationship with God in order to maintain the natural rhythms of our natural world. When mankind does not keep God's commands, the whole world and the cosmos suffers.

Lest we digress too far - back to *Shavuot*, during that annual ceremony and ritual the men would also have the privilege of

gazing upon the specially consecrated *Temple* Bread, known as the *Bread of the Face of God.*”

There the priests were instructed to go into to the Temple and bring out the altar table, which held the twelve loaves of consecrated “Presence of God Bread.” The table was then veiled and at the appointed time, the veil was removed and the assembled group of men would recommit themselves to the Lord God and the Law of Moses.

Up until the sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ, God had fed the people and sustained their well being in the keeping of the Law. However, in the New Covenant, and here we must link *Shavuot*, Pentecost, and the birth of the Church together, all the benefits of the Law and the ritual Memorial Feast Days are now present in the partaking of the Body and Blood of the Lamb of God fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ and received in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the Eucharistic celebration we are privileged, as were Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, the priests, and the seventy elders at the time the Law was given to Moses to actually partake in a holy covenantal meal with God. Here we would encourage the rereading of Exodus 24 because neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament can be understood without a thorough understanding of covenant ritual and the covenant renewal meals associated with keeping those covenants intact.

Each time we receive the Eucharist we are given the opportunity to once again reestablish our communion in the body of Jesus Christ; however, and here is the key, we do not consume a roasted sacrificial lamb like the children of Israel during the first Passover and every subsequent Passover meal thereafter; but instead, we

are given the privilege to become the Body of Christ by eating the Body and Blood of the sacrificial Lamb of God, for He is both one and the same (See Book of Revelation).

However, we do have a choice to make. We can either accept God's gift of eternal life or we can reject it. Moses said,

See, I have today set before you life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I am giving you today, loving the LORD, your God, and walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, statutes and ordinances, you will live and grow numerous, and the LORD, your God, will bless you in the land you are entering to possess (Deut. 30:15-20 NAB).

Jesus told His disciples: " If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you an Advocate who will be with you always.

And so the Church continues to pray, *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, come Holy Spirit, come and fill your Church a fresh, renew her with your Holy Presence in the Jewish festival of *Shavuot* and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

For we pray in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.