

PENTECOST SUNDAY
Theme: "RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT"

On the feast of Ascension Sunday that we celebrated last weekend, we're blessed with two of our parishioners who received First Holy Communion. Today, as we celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost Sunday, we're again blessed with Sarah Ryder, who will be received into Roman Catholic Church through the Sacraments of initiation (Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation). We extend our hearty congratulations and God's blessing to Sarah. Thanks to her family and the sponsors. I am also very grateful to Mary Hendricks, the OCIA Coordinator, and her partner, Brenda Albright, Doris Sandreth, the DRE, and the entire team of our School of Religion. God bless!

Pentecost Sunday is known as the "birthday of the Church" because it was on day of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus, came upon his disciples who were gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. With the gift of the Holy Spirit, they were able to preach God's salvation in Jesus with courage, confidence, and great zeal. No more fear of the Scribes and the Pharisees, the enemies of the Gospel. Today, the Church has spread to all corners of the World. Thanks be to God!

In the first reading, St. Luke, in his book the Acts of the Apostles, describes the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles and its great effects on them. The Jews celebrated the Fifty Days after Passover, the giving of the Mosaic Law at Sinai, and the establishment of Israel as God's people. Luke, who follows the early Christian custom of celebrating the communication of the Spirit at the conclusion of the 50 days, Pentecost, for him and his early Christian community, the descent of the Holy Spirit saw the birth of a new community, the Church, not a new nation.

For John, the communication of the Holy Spirit took place on Easter day as we heard in the Gospel reading. Some theologians called this reading "The Pentecost according to John." In spite of their differences in the narrative of the descent of the Holy Spirit, they both agreed and stressed that the Christian message is not for the Jews only but for all people.

St. John tells us after Jesus' appearance to his disciples who were gathered in the Upper Room waiting for the descent of the Holy Spirit per Jesus' instruction, he wished them peace. Then Jesus commissioned them by breathing the Holy Spirit on them: "RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT." Breath was a sign of life for the ancient Hebrews. Recall in Genesis 2:7 that God breathed on the first man, Adam, and gave him life. So, just as Adam's life came from God, now the disciples' new spiritual life comes from Jesus. We also received the Holy Spirit during Baptism and at Confirmation when we were sealed with the Holy Spirit which made us full members of the Church and children of God. The Holy Spirit also empowered us to continue the mission Christ has entrusted to his apostles. If you recall the Gospel of the Ascension Sunday, Jesus mandated all of us: "GO INTO THE WORLD AND PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE. WHOEVER BELIEVES AND IS BAPTIZED WILL BE SAVED; WHOEVER DOES NOT BELIEVE WILL BE CONDEMNED." How faithful are you carrying out this mandate of Jesus Christ?

The Holy Spirit, the third person in the Trinity, empowers us to carry on the mission of Christ with courage, confidence, and great zeal without fear. If we allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us, then it will bear fruits some Paul talks about in the second reading namely "LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GENEROSITY, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, SELF-CONTROL." These are truly the fruits of the Spirit of God. But if not, and we engage in a spirit of self-indulgence, then the fruits will be what St. Paul referenced in the second reading: "IMMORALITY, IMPURITY, OUTBURSTS OF FURY, ACTS OF SELFISHNESS, DISSENSIONS, FACTIONS, OCCASIONS OF ENVY, DRINKING BOUTS, ORGIES AND THE LIKE." Such people, as St. Paul warns, have no place in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus also tasked them with the power to forgive sins: "WHOSE SINS YOU FORGIVE ARE FORGIVEN THEM, AND WHOSE SINS YOU RETAIN ARE RETAINED." The Council of Trent defined this power to forgive sins is exercised in the Sacrament of Penance/Confession.

My dear people of God, as we celebrate Pentecost Sunday today, for me, it is day for us to re-examine our life to see if the Holy Spirit we received at baptism and confirmation is really bearing the good fruits St. Paul mentioned in his letter to the Galatian Christian Community. Let us all pray the prayer of the Responsorial Psalm, "LORD, SEND OUT YOUR SPIRIT, AND RENEW THE FACE OF THE EARTH." We need the assistance of the Holy Spirit to heal our "wounded world." May our Mother Mary and her beloved husband, St. Joseph, continue to intercede for us. Amen!