

Pentecost (C)

8th June 2025

‘Keep the flame of faith alive in your hearts’

Acts 2: the Pentecost experience

Ps 103: *Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth*

Rom 8: *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God*

Jn 14: *The Holy Spirit will teach you everything.*

The *Gifts of the Holy Spirit* include: *Wisdom, Understanding, & Knowledge*, ... all things, I guess, that you could do with in abundance in these exam weeks! “*He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all I have said to you*”! Perhaps you’re better off, then, having exams post-Pentecost, as some of you still do! A great prayer intention, today, then, for you whose exam season isn’t over, that the Spirit be upon you for wisdom and peace. Others of you are done & dusted ... so Pentecost is instead a chance to be sent off into the summer, into vacations, travels to home and holidays — your sails filled with the gust of the Spirit — and which for some of you is a final departure from London and university, off into life ahead and the world of work: great need for you to have *Courage, Piety, & Right Judgment* which are also Gifts of the Spirit, as you discern the next stages of your life: what to pursue, where to live, with whom to stay close. “*The Father will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.*” Something for everyone, then, at this great celebration that concludes Eastertide.

Pentecost, surely, is a feast that heartily grabs our attention ... who could not want to be *filled with the Spirit of God*, for it is He who completes, perfects, and purifies our human nature? We can live our lives so much better when we live in the Spirit. Deprived of the Spirit life is dark and confusing; life in the Spirit is radiant and meaningful. St Paul in Rom 8 (2nd Reading) is at lengths to persuade us of this: a verse or two before the passage we heard today he says: “*To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace*” (v. 6). It’s right, then, that this 50th day of Easter — hence the name, ‘Pentecost’ — we keep with due solemnity and spiritual joy. Along with Christmas, Epiphany and Easter, it ranks as one of the highest feasts of the calendar. For the bestowing of the personal Gift of the Holy Spirit on the Church — and on the world through the Church — is a necessary and crucial part of Salvation History, intended from eternity by the Loving God. Having offered His supreme saving sacrifice on Good Friday, been raised to life again on Easter morning, appeared to His disciples for

40 days, and then ascended to the Father in heaven ... all these still remain incomplete without the event of Pentecost. We know how the apostles, despite all that they had witnessed first hand in accompanying Jesus to the Cross, the Grave, and seeing Him Risen and Ascended, were still hidden away from the world in the Upper Room. Until Pentecost, that is. This was not a ‘middling’ sort of an event, a mediocre spiritual awakening. This was a *fire from heaven*, a spiritual earthquake, shaking their very lives; all in the vicinity were “bewildered,” wondering what on earth was happening in this quarter of Jerusalem. It was a busy time: Pentecost was a sacred and popular Jewish feast (the ‘Festival of Weeks,’ or ‘Festival of First-Fruits’), and pilgrims were thronging the Holy City. No one in the vicinity of the Upper Room that Pentecost morning — Jews from across the vast *diaspora* of the Near East and Mediterranean — can have been unaware of the astonishing bursting-in to history of the power of the Spirit. Attuned as they were to the workings of God in their great 1800-yr history, yet this was altogether

something new: “*they were amazed and astonished*” ... “*Bewildered, each one hearing [the apostles] speak in his own language.*” Suddenly, God was breaking open the confines of salvation: no longer restricted to Jerusalem, Israel, or the Jews, but now thrown open to all languages, races and cultures. This had always been promised by God — the message of the prophets contained this intention from long before, and Jesus Himself had paid keen attention to those outside the bounds of the Chosen People — but now it was really happening, and suddenly the Apostles of the Messiah, the Shepherds of the New Flock, were speaking to the whole world, in every tongue known to man: everyone in this cosmopolitan city of Jerusalem, from wherever he/she came, was suddenly hearing the proclamation of the Gospel.

This is the *birthday of the Church*, then. No longer remaining hidden in the womb where she had been nurtured for 3 years by the personal ministry of Jesus, the Church now came out into the world: the shutters of the Upper Room came up, the Apostles spilled out on to the

balconies and streets, filled with the power of the Spirit, to begin delivering the life-saving message of Jesus to the world. A birthday celebration indeed, which we happily keep today, almost 2,000 yrs later (1,992yrs, to be precise!)

We shall *blow out the birthday candle*, today — this great Paschal Candle, lit from the New Fire at Easter and burning here in the Chapel throughout all the liturgies of the past 7 wks. It has burnt here brightly and prominently to remind us of the Resurrection, the light beyond all lights, that enlightens the world and dispels the darkness of death. Why, now, after Pentecost, is it blown out and removed from the sanctuary? *Not because we cease to celebrate the Resurrection*, because every day of the year in the Church, every day of a Christian's life, is a celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus, without which we have no faith and no hope. But surely, once Pentecost comes, because we no longer need to have that Paschal Candle before us, for the fire of that Easter Light passes into *us*, into those anointed with the Spirit. The manifestation of the Spirit at Pentecost was of “*divided*

tongues of fire appear[ing] to them and rest[ing] on each one of them,” wasn't it? Representations in art of the near-indescribable mystical event of Pentecost often show Our Lady and the Apostles almost like human candles, the flame of the Spirit's resting on their heads, marking their ‘being on fire’ with the Spirit, their minds filled with the joy-giving, fear-dispelling Gift of God Himself to them. *They were going out into the world* from that moment on, into the Jerusalem streets, out into Judaea, thence to Samaria, Syria, Asia Minor and eventually to central Asia, N. Africa and Europe (Greece and Rome) ... even in the Apostolic era they got that far, probably farther. And they were being asked to *keep alight that flame of faith* supplied with the fuel of the Spirit at Pentecost. Any one of us knows how easy it is to keep a candle lit indoors, and how hard it is to keep that same flame alight the moment you step outdoors. But that's what the newborn Church was setting out to do, that day. On the very birth-day of the Church, she didn't choose to stay indoors and enjoy the party: no, she *immediately* flung open wide the doors! —

immediately set out to take the flame of faith to others. The fascinated throng in Jerusalem heard St Peter preach a great 1st sermon, and hundreds were baptized into Jesus that very day: “a flame divided but undimmed.” This mission is echoed in every Christian’s baptism when the *neophyte*, the newly baptized person, receiving a Baptismal Candle lit from the Paschal Candle, hears the minister say,:

“You have been enlightened by Christ. Walk always as a child of the Light, and keep the flame of faith alive in your heart.”

“Keep the flame of faith alive in your hearts” — yes, even as it is carried out of Church and into the blustery world where not every gust is the breath of the Spirit, by any means; and many an evil wind will try to extinguish that flame. Protect and feed that flame with grace and prayer, and do not put it at serious risk of being blown out by careless neglect of one’s spiritual life, or by one’s choices or one’s company. *Jesus* needs to be our most regular companion, so as to “keep the flame of faith alive in your hearts,” Pentecost perpetuated and prolonged.

What a great image with which to set out into the

summer! Whatever the summer holds for you, whether it’s the long hard slog of a Master’s project or dissertation; whether it’s revision for remaining exams or postponed exams; whether it’s vacation work of one sort or another in London or back living with family; whether it’s a chance for some mind-broadening travel alone or with friends; or whether it’s that daunting and sometimes long climb to finding a worthy job that will engage your talents and be of good to one’s fellow men ... whatever the summer holds, we each need to be renewed with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. As you sit in God’s holy presence this Pentecost Sunday, *what is the Gift that you most need from Him today / this summer?* Ask Him for it. Ask the Holy Spirit, that truly loving person of the Triune Godhead, for His personal Gift to you, whatever it is that you need. He does not need convincing to be generous, but He does desire that you will it from Him, and seek that indwelling of transforming grace:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful, and kindle in them the fire of Thy Love; send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created, and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.