

PENTECOST 2020

Friends, good morning!

Today we celebrate the great Feast of Pentecost, where we reflect on the Second Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, coming down on the Twelve Apostles fifty days after Easter Sunday.

Now, it might seem a little strange that the Gospel that we just heard obviously is taking place on **Easter** Sunday, not **Pentecost** Sunday. It says right there “on the evening of that day” — meaning the evening of Easter Sunday — the day that Mary Magdalene, Peter and John went out to find the empty tomb. That's when this event takes place.

So let me address that. Why is the Church giving us this gospel account on Pentecost Sunday? Well the answer is twofold. First, it's because the gospels do not have accounts of what happened on Pentecost Sunday—that can only be found in the book of Acts. So that's given to us in the first reading for today.

Secondly, the Church chooses this gospel today because of the reference to the Holy Spirit, to the giving of the Holy Spirit. So, as we heard, on the

evening of Easter Sunday, when Jesus appears to the apostles, he breathes on them and he says “receive the Holy Spirit.”

If we go back in the tradition regarding this passage, it has always been interpreted — at least in the fourth century in the writings of St. Cyril of Jerusalem — as a kind of “anticipation of what will happen at Pentecost.”

So what St. Cyril said is that the apostles on Easter Sunday receive the Holy Spirit in part, particularly with the power to forgive and retain sins, and it **points forward** to the fact that at Pentecost they will receive it “in the fullness of God's Spirit.” In other words, what is given to them now as a power, will be given to them fully in the **indwelling** of the Holy Spirit at the feast of Pentecost.

So the Church gives us this reading as a kind of anticipation of Pentecost, but she couples it with the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, which is the full narrative of the account of Pentecost.

So let's talk about the Holy Spirit...

You know, most of our prayers to the Holy Spirit involve asking the Holy Spirit to come. A monk

named Symeon the Theologian, who lived around 1000 years ago, wrote a prayer that begins: “Come, true light! Come, eternal life! Come, hidden mystery! Come, nameless treasure!” It goes on and on using 30 different titles for the Holy Spirit, each of which starts with the word “come.”

You might remember we heard Jesus at the Last Supper a couple weeks ago telling his disciples, “I will not leave you orphans; **I will come to you.** In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me because I live and you will live.... I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth.” It is this other Advocate who gives us the hope and the joy and the love that comes from knowing that Jesus is with us. Just as Jesus reveals the Father to us, the Spirit reveals Jesus to us. And we experience this in many many ways, but most especially in the Sacraments, in performing acts of mercy, and in encountering the Scriptures.

St. Augustine calls the Holy Spirit our inner Master, our inner teacher, and the Spirit of Truth.

You know, when I think of the Holy Spirit in my own life, I think primarily of the many small kindnesses and encouragements I’ve experienced from others—

teachers, friends, family—that helped keep me on track and to make choices that helped me avoid falling prey to serious corruption and real evil that I know I could've gotten into. That's my sense of how the Holy Spirit has worked in my life; for me, the Spirit has been both kind of a guide and a protector. Maybe for you a comforter, or a teacher, or maybe something else... How has God worked, or is working, in your life?

The Holy Spirit is like the wind; we can't see the wind but we see its effects: we see what it does as it shakes the trees and flies kites and brings in the clouds that give us rain. The Spirit works in hundreds and thousands of ways, to be a gift to us and to help bring us to God.

Now I'd like to make a couple final points. The first is just to share that there is a fascinating teaching about the event of Pentecost. The idea is that the Pentecost uniting of the peoples of different tongues is the opposite of the event of the destruction of the Tower of Babel. So Pentecost undoes humanities division; now humanity has the possibility of unity in Jesus Christ... Something interesting to reflect on...

My second and final point is that there are two very powerful ways of speaking of the Spirit. We say that

the Spirit is the spirit of **love**, or charity, and the spirit is also the Spirit of **Truth**, as Jesus stated.

And with regard to these I'd like to close with the following, from St. Edith Stein, and I think what she says here is very important for us as Christians:

“Do not accept anything as the truth if it lacks love. And do not accept anything as love which lacks truth.”

Come Holy Spirit. Amen.