

## Pentecost Sunday C - The Inauguration of Church's Universal Mission

June 5, 2022.

This Sunday, the last day of the Easter season, we celebrate the Pentecost, recalling the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles 50 days after the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Pentecost traditionally marks the “birth” of the Church, **the inauguration of the Universal Mission of the Church — the Church is “going public”** The frightened men in the upper room are emboldened by the Holy Spirit to go out and proclaim the Good News, and the Holy Spirit helps them to be understood. Some see this moment as reversing what happened at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9): if the pride of men led them to division and misunderstanding, the Spirit of the Lord brings them back together again into one people through reconciliation with God and with each other.

In the first reading from Acts (2:1-11), Luke was conscious of his task of telling the world the vast complexity of the Church's early development. He met this challenging difficulty by choosing several events that were turning points in the Church's history, and presenting them in a dramatic way that made clear their profound significance. Luke's story was the Church's first courageous witness, and its subsequent announcing of the Good News throughout the known world, was a remarkable fulfillment of the Saviour's promise that he would give his disciples courage and power through the gift of his own Spirit (Mk 13:9-11). The universality of the Church's mission is made clear. The Church's first witness is to ‘devout people from every nation’ - in the first place to ‘Jews’, but the conversion of the gentiles is also anticipated. In the continuation of our passage, Peter's sermon gives a summary of the Church's early witness.

No matter how great a person tries to write or speak, words fail to convey human experience. From the emotions of a mother's first sight of a newborn healthy child to the feeling of being in a small boat during a storm at sea, we can sometimes capture something of an experience, without being able to capture the thing itself. Luke finds himself at the limits of language as he writes of the Pentecost experience. He writes in this Sunday's first reading (Acts 2:1-11), **“When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.”** The sound was like the rush of a violent wind. The tongues were as of fire. This is like when Luke wrote of Jesus' baptism, “[As he was] praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.” In fact, the Pentecost experience was a creative force that has rippled through space and time as the Holy Spirit has remained active in the world. Before that morning, the Jesus Movement was relatively small. The greatest preacher in the world sometimes had thousands on a hillside, but mostly walked and talked with a smaller travelling band of men and women so that they could all be in one place on that 50th day after Easter. By the end of the day, the sum total of Christ-followers would never fit in a single room again.

The impact can also be seen in the person of Peter. Fifty days earlier, he denied he even knew Jesus. In the time since, he first huddled out of fear, but then after Jesus' appearance and his ascension, he worshiped with others in the Temple in Jerusalem, and with the other timid disciples became bold evangelists proclaiming the Good News of Jesus, helping people from around the world to hear the Gospel in their own mother tongue. The Holy Spirit reversed the confusion of the Tower of Babel, serving as a unifying force bringing separate people together so each heard the same Good News in a way she or he could best understand. Peter boldly shares the story of Jesus and tells the crowd, **“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord**

**our God calls to him.** Luke concludes, **“So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”** (Acts 2:38-42)

In business “going public” refers to what is called an initial public offering (IPO): a private company becomes publicly traded and owned through giving the public an opportunity to buy shares in the company. The Lord came and prepared his disciples, especially the Apostles, to go out and make the Gospel “public.” **The gifts of the Holy Spirit we receive, big and small, are talents we can invest for the building up and the expansion of the Church.**

This Sunday’s gospel reading (John 20:19-23) is a meditation upon those who find faith in Christ, have the Father and the Son ‘make their home’ in them. Those who have received the gift of Christ’s own Spirit will be led to know how the Saviour is the source of hope for the whole world - as the Spirit ‘reminds’ them of all that Jesus said and did. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, the very life principle of the Church; the Spirit dwells in each believer as our ‘paraclete –’the companion who stands by us in all our trials, providing whatever is needed to survive every trial. We live ‘in Christ’ because he has given us his own Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, the power of the Spirit is already at work within us. It is the ongoing assurance of the risen Christ’s presence in his body, the Church. **“I will send to you the Spirit of truth, says the Lord; he will guide you to all truth.”** (John 16:7). **The Advocate will be a teacher, helping us to understand fully the meaning of all that Jesus said and did in his earthly ministry. Our choice is whether we resist it or embrace it in the spirit of Christ.** Are we ready to live a life in the Spirit, embracing God’s will as the path that leads to fulness of life? Are we willing to continue carrying out Christ’s mission on earth? Are we ready to share our faith with someone outside our immediate family? When is the last time we show our faith publicly, like something as simple as signing of the Cross in public? Did we do some outreach as a member of our parish? Let the Holy Spirit inspire us to go out and inflame the hearts of others with our faith. If our heart is not on fire, start there first. Sharing Jesus’ love in ways small or big. God will handle the rest. While the idea of asking God to use us in the week ahead might be frightening, know that we have done this before. We might have gone for a walk or sat with a friend or co-worker in need. We might have shared a meal and offered a listening ear, or cut grass or shovelled snow for a neighbour who was sick. Each of us has been there for someone else before. The challenge here is to follow the Spirit’s lead and then those occasions will be more frequent. The Church is built up when we use our individual talents for the good of all. We are all labourers whom the Lord asks to go into the harvest. **The Holy Spirit confirms us in our faith so we can act in Jesus’ name authoritatively, boldly, and freely. The Spirit helps us pray and listen to our Father (Rm 8:26). We’re in touch with Him; we know what we’re doing; we have reason to be bold. The Spirit also teaches us the Word of God (Jn 14:26)** and when we know God’s Word, the devil can’t get away so easily with robbing us. Even as we face the difficulties and trials on our earthly journey, we should rejoice that the Holy Spirit is ever present, enlightening our mind with hope and gradually forming Christ in us as he did in the womb of Mary. We know enough to claim our inheritance. Finally, the Spirit empowers us to obey. It is in the power of the Spirit that the Church takes up its mission. Today, before all days, the Church invites us to deepen our faith in the Saviour’s gift of his own Spirit. Already in the Old Testament, ‘the Spirit of God’ was active as a life-giving force at work in creation. Anointed by the Spirit as God’s ‘Servant’, in fulfilment of the prophecies of the Book of Isaiah, Jesus has led us to know the Spirit as a Person sharing the one divine life with the Father and the Son. **Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, through Christ Our Lord, Amen.**