

Pentecost



June 4, 2017



*O God, who by the mystery  
of today's great feast  
sanctify your whole Church  
in every people and nation, pour out, we pray,  
the gifts of the Holy Spirit across the face of the earth  
and, with the the divine grace that was at work  
when the Gospel was first proclaimed,  
fill now once more the hearts of believers.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Collect for Pentecost

Like many great feasts of the Church, this Feast has a celebration on the Vigil as well as on the Feast day. On the Vigil, the Collect as well as the readings differ from the Sunday readings. Reflecting totally on each of these we have a minimal vision of what this Feast is all about. For the Vigil there are two suggested Collects. The first one points back to the Book of Genesis where we hear about the story of the Tower of Babel. (Genesis 11:1-9)

*Almighty ever-living God,  
who willed the Paschal Mystery to be encompassed as a sign in fifty days  
grant that from out of the scattered nations the confusion of many tongues  
may be gathered by heavenly grace into one great confession of your name.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

The story of the Tower of Babel is considered "prehistory". As it written after the story of the flood of Noah, it was meant to explain the diverse languages throughout the world. It also tells of the people who were trying to build a tower that reached into the heavens where God resided. The people who were building the tower wished to make a name for themselves among all the other peoples. God had a different idea.



*Come, let us go down and there and confuse their language,  
so that no one will understand the speech of another.  
So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth,  
and they stopped building the city.*

(Genesis 11:7-8)

When we reflect on the Liturgy of the Word for Sunday, we have a reading from the Acts of the Apostles. (Acts 2:1-11)

*... how does each of us hear them in his own native language?  
We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and*

*Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,  
Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene,  
as well as travelers from Rome,  
both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs,  
yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.*

(Acts 2: 8-11)



The nations listed here were the whole known world. If you look at the map of the first century A.D. all these countries bordered the Mediterranean Sea, which was what the people knew as the whole world. They all spoke different languages but as Peter and those in the Upper Room spoke, they understood

them. This great miracle seemed to undo what happened at the Tower of Babel.

In the turmoil of our present world, it is important that we learn to listen with our hearts as well as our minds. War would not be waged if we truly listened to one another, listening to actions as well as words. Modern words for this would be compromise and negotiation. If we could listen to another point of view we could see that there are many ways of living. Fanaticism would not be happening.

Nearly twenty years ago, Pope St. John Paul II addressed Muslim Religious Leaders in Abuja, Nigeria saying: *Whenever violence is done in the name of religion, we must make it clear to everyone that in such instances we are not dealing with true religion. For the Almighty cannot tolerate the destruction of His own image in His children.*

We must become a people who listen and are directed by the Spirit of God who resides within us.

*Come Holy Spirit. Come! Fill the hearts of your people.*

*Come Holy Spirit that we may be aware:*

- aware of the people around us, especially the poor and oppressed*
- aware of the children, the young people, all the people striving to grow into their dignity as children of God*
- aware of the world around us, especially the environment with its plants and animals, with its land and water, with its air and space, with all its mystery*
- aware of the structures of power, especially those that keep people poor or powerless or confused or unfree*
- aware of the violence and the threats of violence, which are not the ways of Jesus*
- aware of ourselves and our bias and stereotypes and all our unfreedom*

- aware of all the possibilities for freedom and joy and life.

*Come Holy Spirit. Come! Fill the hearts of your people.*

*Give us the freedom to see. Give us the wisdom and courage to speak.*

Another reading, for the Vigil, from the prophet Joel points to centuries later, into the Church filled with the Spirit. (Joel 3:1-5)

*Thus says the LORD:*

*I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh.*

*Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams,  
your young men shall see visions; even upon the servants and the handmaids,  
in those days, I will pour out my spirit.*

*And I will work wonders in the heavens and on the earth,  
blood, fire, and columns of smoke;*

*the sun will be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood,  
at the coming of the day of the LORD, the great and terrible day.*

*Then everyone shall be rescued who calls on the name of the LORD;*

*for on Mount Zion there shall be a remnant,*

*as the LORD has said, and in Jerusalem survivors whom the LORD shall call.*

Another suggested reading for the Vigil Exodus 19:3-8a, 16-20b. In this reading Moses is summoned, with all the people of Israel, and God sends fire down upon them as was done on Pentecost. Ezekiel 37:1-14 is another alternate reading suggested for the Vigil. It is a vision of dry bones covering the land which were then given new life as were the people on Pentecost. The dry bones were filled with the Spirit of God.

Both the Vigil and the Feast day have us raise our voices with the response *Lord, send out your spirit, and renew the face of the earth.* This prayer is certainly necessary with all the turmoil that the whole world is experiencing.

The second reading for the vigil is taken from the letter of Paul to the Romans (8:22-27). This reading is a sign of hope for each of us.

*In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness;*

*for we do not know how to pray as we ought,*

*but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings.*

*And the one who searches hearts*

*knows what is the intention of the Spirit,*

*because he intercedes for the holy ones*

*according to God's will.*

(Romans 8:26-27)

As each of us pray, we sometimes feel lost and do not know how to pray so we must trust that the Spirit prays for and with us.

The gospel for the Vigil speaks of the living water and it points back to the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament: Isaiah 12:3; Ezekiel 47:1) and forward to the coming of the Spirit on the Feast of Pentecost. (John 7:37-39) The setting for this gospel is in Jerusalem, at the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus had sent his disciples up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast and he told them he was not going to go because his life was in jeopardy. After they had left he went up secretly, and on the last day of the feast, Jesus went to the Temple and spoke publicly: *"Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.'"* (John 7:37-38)



When we come to Feast, in the second reading (1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13) St. Paul tells that all people have been gifted with the Spirit. *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.* (vs. 13)

Finally, when we come to the gospel for the Feast Pentecost, it is said to be John's Pentecost. (John 20:19-23) It was happening on the first day of the week, the day of Resurrection. Behind the locked doors, the fearful disciples were gathered.

Earlier in this chapter we have Mary of Magdala going to the tomb and finding the stone rolled back. Then she ran to tell the disciples this. Simon Peter and the "disciple whom Jesus loved" then ran to the tomb, looked in and saw the burial cloths folded where the body of Jesus was once laid. As the disciples returned back to the upper room, Mary of Magdala stayed weeping at the tomb. She entered the tomb to see two angels, one at the foot and the other at the head who asked her why she was weeping. Mary then turned and whom she thought was the gardener asked her again the reason for her tears. Then the man called her by name and she recognized Jesus as her Lord and Teacher. This happened fifty days before the great feast of Pentecost.

What we hear on this Easter Eve was not as spectacular as what is described in the first reading for today from Acts. All of a sudden Jesus was standing in the midst of the disciples and his first words to them were "Peace be with you". This wishing of peace (shalom) is well beyond the absence of war or conflict. In ancient Hebrew *Shalom* means completeness, wholeness, health, peace, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony, the absence of agitation or discord. Following the greeting of peace, Jesus then sent the disciples forth. The Pentecost event happened with the following words and action: *he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."* (vs. 22-23) Speaking of the forgiveness of sins is the institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Personally, as we experience the sacrament all the words to describe *shalom* speak of what we experience in having our sins forgiven. From the time of crucifixion Jesus sent forth his Spirit, forever with us.