



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog

For the Day of Pentecost: "Whitsunday" - May 23, 2021

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."

Acts 2:1 (KJV)

British author C. Gordon Brownville in his 1945 book, "Symbols of the Holy Spirit," tells this story about the great Norwegian polar explorer Roald Amundsen (the first human to discover the South Pole in addition to the magnetic meridian of the North Pole):

"On one of his trips north, Amundsen took with him a homing pigeon. When he had finally reached the top of the world, he opened the bird's cage and set it free. Imagine the delight of Amundsen's wife back in Norway. When she looked up from the doorway of her home and saw the pigeon circling in the sky above, no doubt she exclaimed:

'He's alive! My husband is still alive!'"



And so it was when Jesus ascended into heaven: He was gone, but the disciples clung to His promise to send them the Holy Spirit. What joy, then, must have been theirs when the dovelike Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost - for the disciples had with them the continual

and the eternal reminder that Jesus was indeed alive, and victorious, and reigning at the right hand of the Father! And this, might I add, continues to be the Holy Spirit's message today - a message, by the way, that needs to be delivered to a desperate and hurting world:

☪ **Jesus is still alive, and still victorious, and still reigning at the right hand of the Father!**



Pentecost, like the Ascension ten days ago, is not as well-known or as popular as the festivals of Christmas and Easter, even though it commemorates a watershed event in Christian history. Because, in many ways, Pentecost is “The Birthday of the Church.” In short, for Christians, Pentecost is when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the early followers of Jesus Christ. And did you know that Pentecost ranks after Easter as the second greatest festival in the Church? **The second!** Hence, Pentecost is the secondary date for baptisms, with a baptismal ceremony closely resembling that of the Paschal (or Easter) Vigil Service on Holy Saturday, recalling the first “new members class” that joined the Church after St. Peter’s Pentecost sermon (as testified in Acts 2:41).

In fact, centuries ago in Britain, those joining the church (that is, the soon-to-be baptized) wore white baptismal robes on this particular Sunday. Thus, Pentecost also came to be called “White Sunday” or “Whitsunday.” Moreover, the term “Whitsunday” also derives from the “wisdom” that Jesus’ disciples received as a gift of His Holy Spirit.

Anyhow, on that first Christian Pentecost morning, the disciples were waiting in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, according to their Master Jesus’ firm instructions for them to wait there patiently for the coming gift of His Holy Spirit, as recorded by St. Luke in 24:49 of his Gospel:

“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Subsequently, as we heard from today’s Lesson (Acts 2:2-4):

“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

Make no mistake about it – with the anointing of the Holy Spirit on that first Christian Pentecost morning, Jesus’ promise had been fulfilled. For in that glorious moment, every fear was dispelled, every doubt was removed, and Jesus was declared as the King of Heaven and the “Divine Son of God.”

What’s more, the languages spoken by the early Christians on that first Christian Pentecost morning were “comprehensible” – meaning that they were not other worldly or “divine” (that is, unintelligible to human ears, what “speaking in tongues” or “Glossolalia” normally entails) – and were heard by thousands of Jewish pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem from numerous far-flung foreign countries to celebrate “Shavuot” – or the Jewish “Feast of Weeks” – the second of the three “solemn feasts” (the other two being “Passover” and the “Feast of Tabernacles”) that all able-bodied Jewish males were required to travel to Jerusalem to attend each year (according to Exodus 23:14-17; 34:22-23; Deuteronomy 16:16).

In any event, we are told in Acts 2:11-12 that the content of the miraculous messages the apostles were delivering – **in languages completely foreign to them** – had to do with God’s mighty works. (And many of the out-of-towners who heard these messages in their own languages were simply amazed, while others thought the Christians were just drunk.)

At that point, St. Peter stood up and preached his first sermon, which I highly recommend reading (Acts 2:14-40). And in verses 16-21 of his impromptu address to the crowd gathered in Jerusalem, St. Peter interpreted the events of that morning in light of an Old Testament prophecy (Joel 2:28-32).

You see, through Joel, God promised to pour out His Spirit on all flesh, empowering diverse people to exercise Divine power, which Joel noted would be a definite sign of the coming “Day of the Lord.” As a result, St. Peter informed the people that Joel’s “Day of the Lord” (that is, the day when God, through His Holy Spirit, would empower diverse people to exercise Divine power) **had finally come**.



Now, power can be used in at least two ways:

- ⊗ **it can be *unleashed*; or**
- ⊗ **it can be *harnessed*.**

For instance, the energy contained in 50 litres of gasoline in a jerry can could be released explosively by dropping a lighted match into the can. Or it could be channeled through the engine of a car in a controlled burn and used to transport a person 650 kilometres. To be sure, explosions are spectacular, but controlled burns have lasting effect – what we might call “staying power.”

And God’s Holy Spirit works both ways. At Pentecost, He exploded on the scene; His presence, as we read in Acts 2:3, was like “tongues of fire,” and thousands were forever affected by one burst of God’s mighty power. However, God also works through His Church (the Holy institution that He began on that first Christian Day of Pentecost) to tap into the Holy Spirit’s power **for the long haul**.



Therefore, St. Peter went on to explain (in verses 32-33), Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead and had poured out His Holy Spirit in direct fulfillment of God's promise through Joel. Finally, St. Peter declared (verse 36):

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

When the crowd, now cut to the quick, asked what they should do, St. Peter urged them (in verses 37-39) to turn their lives entirely around and to be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ.

Then, St. Peter affirmed, they would receive forgiveness for their sins and would likewise receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:41 reports that about 3,000 people were added to the Church that day – not a bad response to St. Peter's first sermon!)

Truly, then, the disciples had been equipped with wisdom, beyond their natural ability, to fulfill our Lord Jesus' "Great Commission" – as attested by St. Matthew in 28:19a of his Gospel – to:

"Go into the world and make disciples of all nations."

This gift of wisdom is one that we should also earnestly desire, for as St. Paul states (Romans 8:14):

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

We should also seek other gifts of the Spirit of which, as stated by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:8b-10, there are many, such as:

- ✎ *"knowledge...*
- ✎ *faith...*
- ✎ *healing...*
- ✎ *miraculous powers...*
- ✎ *prophecy...*
- ✎ *discernment...*
- ✎ *speaking in tongues... and...*
- ✎ *interpretation of tongues."*

Spiritual gifts are to be used for the edification (or the building up and the strengthening) of the Body of Christ, His Church. Also, proper use of the gifts of the Spirit, St. Paul assures us (Galatians 5:22b-23a), results in the "Fruits of the Spirit" which are:

- 🍏 *"love,*
- 🍏 *joy,*
- 🍏 *peace,*
- 🍏 *patience,*
- 🍏 *kindness,*
- 🍏 *goodness,*
- 🍏 *faithfulness,*
- 🍏 *gentleness, and*
- 🍏 *self-control."*

Provided that we – like the disciples 2,000 years ago – are, as St. Luke reports (Acts 2:1b):

"...all with one accord in one place."

Meaning that through daily:

- ✎ **worship, and**
- ✎ **prayer, and**
- ✎ **reading of Holy Scripture, and**
- ✎ **fellowship, and**
- ✎ **service,**

Christians are provided with “Divine staying power,” because God, through the agency of His Holy Spirit, also works through His “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church” – the same eternal institution that He began on that first Christian Day of Pentecost to tap into His Holy Spirit’s power for the long haul.

Then, **and only then**, will real (and lasting) spiritual fruit:

- † love;
- † joy;
- † peace;
- † patience;
- † kindness;
- † goodness;
- † faithfulness;
- † gentleness; and
- † self-control

abound – not only through our faithful congregation here at the Mission of Saint Mary Magdalene, but via other Christian groups worldwide. Because:

- ♥ the love we have for our Triune God;
- ♥ and for each other;
- ♥ and the wisdom to make it known,

These are the true gifts of Pentecost –

Empowering us to match our own deep, spiritual passions with the world’s deep need for a Saviour –

A world that is **literally dying** to hear that:

- ☪ **Jesus is still alive, and still victorious, and still reigning at the right hand of the Father!**



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