

May 31

MASS

Pentecost Sunday

**On Saturday evening, see the Vigil Mass,
pages 443-456.**

By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Christ's Paschal Mystery was brought to its completion. The Holy Spirit prepares us with his grace in order to draw us to Christ. He manifests the risen Lord to us, opening our minds. He makes present the mystery of Christ. And he reconciles us, bringing us into communion with God. Saint Thomas Aquinas says that the Holy Spirit interiorly perfects our spirit, communicating to it a new dynamism so that it refrains from evil for love. With the Holy Spirit within us, "it is quite natural for people who had been absorbed by the things of this world to become entirely otherworldly in outlook, and for cowards to become people of great courage" (Saint Cyril of Alexandria).

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**Wis 1:7**

The Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world/ and that which contains all things/
understands what is said, alleluia.

Or:**Rom 5:5; cf. 8:11**

The love of God has been poured into our hearts/ through the Spirit of God
dwelling within us, alleluia.

GLORIA**COLLECT**

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 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.

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

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.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his 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."

The word of the Lord.

PSALM 104

R/ (cf. 30) Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

Or: Alleluia.

Bless the LORD, O my soul!
O LORD, my God, you are great indeed!
How manifold are your works, O LORD!
The earth is full of your creatures. **R/**

If you take away their breath, they perish
and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth. **R/**

May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD be glad in his works!
Pleasing to him be my theme;
I will be glad in the LORD. **R/**

In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

12:3
b
-7, 12-13

BROTHERS AND SISTERS: No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. 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.

The word of the Lord.

SEQUENCE

Veni, Sancte Spiritus

Come, Holy Spirit, come!
And from your celestial home
Shed a ray of light divine!
Come, Father of the poor!
Come, source of all our store!
Come, within our bosoms shine.
You, of comforters the best;
You, the soul's most welcome guest;
Sweet refreshment here below;
In our labor, rest most sweet;
Grateful coolness in the heat;
Solace in the midst of woe.
O most blessed Light divine,
Shine within these hearts of yours,
And our inmost being fill!
Where you are not, we have naught,
Nothing good in deed or thought,
Nothing free from taint of ill.
Heal our wounds, our strength renew;
On our dryness pour your dew;
Wash the stains of guilt away:
Bend the stubborn heart and will;
Melt the frozen, warm the chill;
Guide the steps that go astray.
On the faithful, who adore
And confess you, evermore
In your sevenfold gift descend;
Give them virtue's sure reward;
Give them your salvation, Lord;
Give them joys that never end. Amen.
Alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful/ and kindle in them the fire of your love. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

As the Father sent me, so I send you: Receive the Holy Spirit.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

20:19-23

ON THE EVENING of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, 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."

The Gospel of the Lord.

CREDO

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Grant, we pray, O Lord,
that, as promised by your Son,
the Holy Spirit may reveal to us more abundantly
the hidden mystery of this sacrifice
and graciously lead us into all truth.
Through Christ our Lord.

PREFACE OF PENTECOST: THE MYSTERY OF PENTECOST

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.

For, bringing your Paschal Mystery to completion,
you bestowed the Holy Spirit today
on those you made your adopted children
by uniting them to your Only Begotten Son.
This same Spirit, as the Church came to birth,
opened to all peoples the knowledge of God
and brought together the many languages of the earth
in profession of the one faith.

Therefore, overcome with paschal joy,
every land, every people exults in your praise
and even the heavenly Powers, with the angelic hosts,
sing together the unending hymn of your glory,
as they acclaim: Holy....

When the Roman Canon is used, the proper form of the Communicantes (In communion with those) is said.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Acts 2:4, 11

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit/ and spoke of the marvels of God, alleluia.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O God, who bestow heavenly gifts upon your Church,
safeguard, we pray, the grace you have given,
that the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out upon her
may retain all its force
and that this spiritual food
may gain her abundance of eternal redemption.
Through Christ our Lord.

SOLEMN BLESSING (OPTIONAL)

May God, the Father of lights,
who was pleased to enlighten the disciples' minds
by the outpouring of the Spirit, the Paraclete,
grant you gladness by his blessing
and make you always abound with the gifts
of the same Spirit.

R. Amen.

May the wondrous flame that appeared above
the disciples,
powerfully cleanse your hearts from every evil
and pervade them with its purifying light.

R. Amen.

And may God, who has been pleased to unite
many tongues
in the profession of one faith,
give you perseverance in that same faith
and, by believing, may you journey from hope
to clear vision.

R. Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, ✠ and the Holy Spirit,
come down on you and remain with you for ever.

R. Amen.

To dismiss the people the Deacon or, if there is no Deacon, the Priest himself sings or says:

Go forth, the Mass is ended, alleluia, alleluia.

Or:

Go in peace, alleluia, alleluia.

And the people reply:

Thanks be to God, alleluia, alleluia.

With Easter Time now concluded, the paschal candle is extinguished. It is desirable to keep the paschal candle in the baptistery with due honor so that it is lit at the celebration of Baptism and the candles of those baptized are lit from it.

Pentecost and Speaking in Tongues

(Year A)

<i>First Reading</i>	Acts 2:1-11
<i>Response</i>	Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Corinthians 12:3B-7, 12-13
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.
<i>Gospel</i>	June 20:19-23

Today's feast is one of the greatest feasts of the liturgical year. It is the feast of Pentecost. So we are looking at the readings for Pentecost Sunday in Year A, and if you look here we will begin with the Gospel. In a way that was similar to the readings for the Solemnity of the Ascension, the Gospel for today is from the Gospel of St. John and it is a little puzzling because you might wonder why we are reading this Gospel on the Feast of Pentecost. Well let's look at it together and we will try to explain it. In John 20:19-23 we read these words:

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."¹

So that's our Gospel reading for Pentecost. It might sound a little strange because obviously this Gospel reading is taking place on Easter Sunday, not Pentecost

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

Sunday, because 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 why is the Church giving us this account on Pentecost Sunday? Well the answer is twofold. First, it's because the Gospels don't have accounts of what happened on Pentecost Sunday — that can only be found in the book of Acts. So that's going to be given to us in the first reading for today. Secondly, the Church chooses John's Gospel for Year A in particular because of the reference to the Holy Spirit, to the giving of the Holy Spirit. So if you look there again, as we just saw, when Jesus appears to the apostles, he breathed on them and he says “receive the Holy Spirit.” If you look at that passage, and if you go back in the tradition, this passage from John 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 slowly 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 go back and look at the first reading there in Acts 2:1-11. This is the first reading for the feast of Pentecost:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native

language? Par'thians and Medes and E'lamites and residents of Mesopota'mia, Judea and Cappado'cia, Pontus and Asia, Phryg'ia and Pamphyl'ia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyre'ne, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."

So that is the reading for Acts 2:1-11. Now there's so much we could talk about with this passage. It is really, really rich, but I just want to focus here on three key elements. Number one, when Luke introduces the passage and he says the day of Pentecost, what was that day? What would it have meant to a first century Jew? Obviously we as Catholics know the feast of Pentecost today as one of the feasts of the liturgical year. We tend to refer to it as the birthday of the Church, that's what the feast of Pentecost is. But Pentecost was, first and foremost, a Jewish holiday, a Jewish feast day, so what does it mean to them? Secondly, why does the Holy Spirit descend upon them in tongues as of fire? We saw the Holy Spirit descend in other forms at other times — like at the baptism of Jesus the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove — so what's the significance of this time the Holy Spirit coming upon them in tongues as of fire? Why doesn't he come down in the form of a dove like at Jesus' baptism? What's the meaning of tongues of fire? And then third and finally, what is the result of the descent of the Holy Spirit? What is all this about the miracle of them speaking in tongues? What does that mean in context in the book of Acts for them to have this miraculous sign of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to speak in tongues in Acts 2. So let's look at each one of those in succession.

First, Pentecost was a Jewish feast. The word in Greek, *pentecostē*, literally means the 50th. So it was the celebration of the 50th day after the offering of the sheaf during Passover. So the first meaning for the festival of Pentecost was a harvest festival. It was a day where they would offer up the firstfruits of the spring harvest to God in thanksgiving, and because it was a great harvest festival, it was a pilgrimage festival as well. The law in the Old Testament in the book of Deuteronomy required that every single adult male would come to Jerusalem — it says this in Deuteronomy 16 — and that they would keep not just the feast of Passover every year, but that 50 days later they would celebrate the feast of Pentecost, which in Hebrew by the way was not called Pentecost, it was called the feast of *Shebuoth*, which means the feast of weeks. In other words, the seven

sevens, so it was the feast of sevens. 7×7 is 49, so it was seven weeks after Passover. Then on the 50th day, they would keep this great harvest festival and they would bring bread and they would offer it up to God in the temple along with other sacrifices. So it was a harvest festival, it was a spring festival, and it was also — and this is really important — in Jewish tradition, a festival of remembrance. It was a memorial feast where the Jews would celebrate the giving of the law to Israel at Mount Sinai. So in Jewish tradition, Passover celebrated the deliverance of Israel from Egypt on the night of the Passover with the Angel of Death, and Pentecost, 50 days later, celebrated the arrival of the Israelites at Mount Sinai in the desert and the reception of the law, the 10 Commandments, on Mount Sinai in the book of Exodus 19-20. So that's what Jews were doing. If it's Pentecost day, everybody is in Jerusalem to offer up the spring harvest, but they are also there to remember the descent of God upon Mount Sinai in the giving of the law in the book of Exodus.

So with that in mind we can now answer the second question. Why does the Holy Spirit descend upon the apostles in tongues as of fire? Well the answer is really simple. If you go back to the book of Exodus 19, it says this about the day that the Jews remembered on Pentecost. In Exodus 19:18, it's describing God coming down upon Mount Sinai to give the Israelites the law. In verse 18 it says “Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.” So there we have it. Just as in the Old Testament, the Lord came down from heaven and descended upon Israel in fire to give them the old law, so now too in the New Testament on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends upon the apostles in tongues as of fire, not to give them the old law, which was written on tablets of stone, but to give them the new law, which is written on the tablets of their hearts. He's now going to put his law within them through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. So this is a very important point because it shows us two things. First, that Pentecost is like a new Mount Sinai, but secondly, also, that the Holy Spirit is divine. It shows the divinity of the Holy Spirit, because in the Old Testament it was the Lord — Yahweh was the Hebrew name for God — who descended upon Mount Sinai in fire. So now it's the spirit who descends upon the apostles in fire at the feast of Pentecost. So this is the great coming of the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised the disciples. That if he went away, he would send them the Spirit, he would send them the Paraclete, he would send them the Advocate, who would

come to dwell with them and to make his home in them in a new and radical way with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. So that is the second question.

The third question, what about the gift of tongues? What about the miracle of tongues in Acts 2? There are lots of debates about what speaking in tongues means in the New Testament, because the miracle of speaking in tongues is mentioned not just in the book of Acts, but it is also mentioned in St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians in chapters 12, 13, and 14. I'm not going to be able to get into St. Paul's teaching on speaking in tongues in First Corinthians, but what I am just going to focus on is the meaning of the gift of tongues in the book of Acts. If you look at the book of Acts in context, very clearly here several things stand out. First, when the disciples begin to speak in tongues, they are clearly speaking in other languages. *Hetereis glōssais* is the Greek expression. So just like a glossary is a book that explains the English language to us, the English tongue, so too here they're speaking in other tongues, other languages, and you can see that in verse 7 when it says “are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?” The Greek word there is *dialektō*, so in other words “our own native dialect.”

So what appears to be happening here is that Jesus' disciples, who were all Galileans, are speaking their language, which is probably Aramaic — although there is some debate about that — but the people hearing it are hearing it in their own native tongues, whether they be from Persia, Media, Cappadocia, Asia or Egypt; they are hearing it in their own language. So this is clearly some kind of miraculous gift. The Holy Spirit has now enabled the apostles to speak about the wonders of God — in other words to say what God has done and has accomplished — but enabled the audience to understand them in their own language. Now why does God do that? What is the significance of this miracle of tongues in the Acts of the Apostles? Well I think most people recognize that this is the beginning of the Gospel being brought to all the ends of the earth. In other words, the good news of the new covenant isn't just for one people. It isn't just for Israel, it is going to be for Israel and for the nations. It is going to be for all the nations of the world. But I would also point out that from a Jewish perspective, something deeper is going on here, because if you were a first century Jew, you would know another famous story that involved multiple tongues. And that is the story of the Tower of Babel. So although the readings for the Sunday of Pentecost do not have anything from

the book of Genesis, if you look at the readings for the vigil of Pentecost, the first reading for that vigil is actually from Genesis 11, the story of the Tower of Babel. So if you go back to Genesis 11 for just a second, I will read this. You all know the story of the Tower of Babel, even children's Bibles contain it. Basically the whole earth is said to have one language and just a few words, and human beings gather together and they say "come...let us make a name for ourselves...let's build a tower and its top will reach to the heavens." This is kind of an expression of their pride and their desire not to glorify God, but to glorify humanity, to glorify themselves. And what happens is, in Genesis 11:7, God says this:

"Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.

Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth."

There is actually a pun there in Hebrew. The word *Bävel* sounds like *balal*, which is the word for confuse. So they called it *Bävel* because there God *balal-ed* their speech, he confused their speech. So that's the story of Genesis 11. What does that have to do with Pentecost? Well it's quite simple. What Pentecost is from an ancient Jewish perspective — remember the apostles were all Jewish Christians so they would've known the Scriptures well — is the reversal of the Tower of Babel. It's the undoing of the sin of Babel. So just as human beings in their pride sought to unite humanity and to unite the world through their own power, God now is going to show them, after the division of Babel, that the only way the world will truly be united is not through human effort and through human pride and human power, but through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the Church. So God, in Genesis 11, confuses the speech of the people, he multiplies the languages precisely so that language now becomes a barrier to human unity, so that you cannot make one single nation, one single people, come together through pure political power that would unite the entire world, because language is such a difficult barrier, such an impediment. And if you've ever tried to travel to other countries where you can't speak the language, you will find out real quick what a barrier language really can be. And even if you learn the language, sometimes there are still barriers, because you misunderstand one another. Well now what's

happening in the feast of Pentecost is that those barriers are being overcome. Not through human means, but through divine means. Those divisions are being overcome not through the power of human beings, but through the power of the Holy Spirit who has now come. The third person of the Trinity has now come to indwell the Church.

And that explains the readings for the rest of this Mass. So if you look at Psalm 104 — I won't read the whole Psalm, it's a beautiful Psalm with the refrain "Lord, Send out your Spirit, and Renew the Face of the Earth." And in Psalm 104:30 we have this image where it says "when you Lord send forth your spirit," and the Hebrew word there is *ruah*, it means spirit, or breath, or wind; it can mean all three of those things. "Sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth." That, in the Old Testament context, is a prayer for God to renew creation through the gift of his Spirit. Because if you look at the beginning of creation, God's Spirit is hovering over the waters, so the prayer is to renew creation. Well that is fulfilled really in Pentecost because God's spirit now comes down and he begins to make everyone know. He makes them a new creation through the indwelling of the Spirit.

The same thing is true of 1 Corinthians 12:3-7. If you look, there is a short section from Paul's letter on the variety of gifts that are given to the Church. In 1 Corinthians 12:3 it says:

I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

So if you pause there, in this case what Paul is referring to in the Greek language — he uses the term *charismatōn* for gifts — when he uses the term different gifts — this is where we get the language of charismatic gifts — is these gifts of the Holy Spirit that God gives to the Church. Why? For the common good. For the building up of the body of Christ, just like we see in the Acts of the Apostles. Why do the apostles get this gift of tongues to be able to speak and be heard in other

languages? Well it is not just so that they can show off their powers. It is not for the sake of sensationalism or display, it is for the sake of the Gospel. It's in order to bring the good news to the nations and build up the body of Christ. And in fact, Paul goes on to say in verse 12, "just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free -- and all were made to drink of one Spirit." That is a fascinating image there of drinking the spirit. So the Spirit is depicted as fire but also as water. By the way, if you look at the rest of Acts — which we didn't read — the image of being intoxicated actually comes up. Because when people see them speaking in tongues and hear people interpreting them, they say that they're just drunk. Some of the nonbelievers, some of the skeptics, say they are just drunk. Obviously they are not drunk, but there is a sense in which they are intoxicated. They been made to drink of the Holy Spirit, they are filled with the Spirit and now have these powers to speak the Gospel in other tongues.

In closing then, what do we make of this feast? Well I would like to close with a couple of comments from the Catechism. The Catechism has a beautiful section on the mystery of Pentecost. It is just a few paragraphs, but it's really rich and it makes two points about the mystery of Pentecost that I'd like to highlight for us. First, the connection between Pentecost and Easter. As you probably know if you pay attention to the liturgical season, Pentecost brings the Easter season to a close. But the Catechism says something more about this. It says that in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, Christ's "Passover is fulfilled." So his Passover is his passion and his death that he undergoes during the feast of Passover. But it's important that we not stop there, because Jesus' passion and his death wasn't the end of the story. It was ultimately ordered toward his resurrection from the dead (the reunion of his soul to his body), his ascension into heaven (the entry of his humanity into the life the Trinity, into the heavenly realm), but then it doesn't stop there, the final goal of Jesus' passion and death and resurrection was the giving of the Holy Spirit. That's the ultimate climax of salvation history. Because in the giving of the Holy Spirit, now the third person has been sent into the world. The third person of the Holy Trinity now comes into the world in a new way to indwell the Church, to indwell the apostles, and to begin his mission in the world of bringing the redemption that Christ won on the cross to the world through the

Church and through the sacraments. So this is a very important feast. It is nothing less than the fulfillment of Easter.

Secondly, the Catechism also says something really important about the mystery of the Trinity, which we will be coming to when we get to the feast of the Most Holy Trinity. It says that on Pentecost something unprecedented happened. “On that day the Holy Trinity is fully revealed” (CCC 732). Up this point, God began to give signs and hints and shadows, prefigurations, of the mystery of the Trinity, but the Trinity has not yet been fully revealed until the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, comes upon the apostles in Pentecost; comes upon them in tongues as of fire and makes known his presence in a visible and powerful and supernatural way. So in a sense, Pentecost is a Trinitarian feast, it is not just a feast of the Holy Spirit. And then finally, this is the feast, as I said in the beginning, of the birthday of the Church. St. Augustine had a great insight on this that I would like to read to you. From one of his sermons, sermon 271, Augustine said this about the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost:

The tongues in which they spoke as the Holy Spirit filled them were a foreshadowing of the Church’s preaching of the Gospel in the tongues of all the nations. After the flood, in pride and defiance of the Lord, an impious generation erected a high tower and so brought about the division of the human race into many language groups... At Pentecost, by contrast, the humble piety of believers brought all these diverse languages into the unity of the Church. What discord had scattered, love was to gather together.²

That is a beautiful quote and that's really the mission of the Holy Spirit. The mission of the Holy Spirit is to bring the love of God into the world and to unite the world not through power, not through pride, but through divine charity.

² Augustine, Sermon 271; trans. E. Barnecut, 1992, p. 73

Pentecost Sunday (Year A)

Acts 2:1-11—The Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost

1. Pentecost: Greek for “fiftieth [day]” (Greek *pentecostē*; Hebrew *Shebuoth*)
 - a. Pilgrimage: all adult men had to travel to Jerusalem (Deut 16:16)
 - b. Harvest: first fruits; seven weeks after Passover (Lev 23:15-17)
 - b. Memorial: of the giving of the law at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-20)
2. Descent of the Holy Spirit: new Mount Sinai
 - a. A “sound from heaven” like a mighty wind (2:2)
 - b. “Tongues as of fire” descended upon them (2:3)
 - c. “Filled with the Holy Spirit” (Greek *pneumatōs hagiou*); Why tongues of fire?
 - d. Mount Sinai: “*the Lord descended upon it in fire*” (Exod 19:18)
3. The Miracle of Tongues: undoing the Tower of Babel
 - a. Begin to speak in “other tongues” = other languages (Greek *heterēis glōssais*)
 - b. Disciples are Galileans but each person hears “his own native language” (2:8)
 - c. Why tongues? *Reversal* of the Tower of Babel (cf. Pentecost Vigil Mass)

“Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. *Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth...* (Genesis 11:7-9)

Psalm 104—Lord, Send out your Spirit, and Renew the Face of the Earth

1. Prayer for God to send forth his “spirit/breath/wind” (Hebrew *ruach*) (104:30)

1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13—the Various “Gifts” of the Spirit

1. Varieties of “gifts” (Greek *charismatōn*) (12:4) for benefit to the Church

John 20:19-23—Jesus Breathes on the Disciples

1. Jesus Breathes on the Disciples: “Receive the Holy Spirit” (20:22; cf. Gen 2:7)
2. Why Twice? They receive it “in part” now, but “in its fullness” at Pentecost
(see Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 17.12)

The Catechism on the Mystery of Pentecost

1. Easter: Outpouring of the Holy Spirit: “fulfills Christ’s Passover” (CCC 731)
2. The Trinity: on Pentecost, “the Holy Trinity is fully revealed” (CCC 732)

Augustine on the Mystery of Pentecost

The tongues in which they spoke as the Holy Spirit filled them were a foreshadowing of the Church’s preaching of the Gospel in the tongues of all the nations. After the flood, in pride and defiance of the Lord, an impious generation erected a high tower and so

brought about the division of the human race into many language groups... At Pentecost, by contrast, the humble piety of believers brought all these diverse languages into the unity of the Church. What discord had scattered, love was to gather together. (Augustine, *Sermon 271*; trans. E. Barnecut, 1992, p. 73)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (Pentecost, Year A)

1. Review the Jewish meaning of the feast of Pentecost (Leviticus 23; Exodus 19-20). What light does the Jewish meaning of the feast shed on the Christian celebration?

2. What is the meaning of the miracle of the disciples speaking in “other tongues”? Why do you think God reveals that humanity will not be united through its own power, but through the power of the Holy Spirit working in the Church?

3. Review the *Catechism*’s teaching on the mystery of Pentecost and the person of the Holy Spirit (CCC) and the sacrament of Confirmation (CCC 1302-1304). What role does the Holy Spirit and the graces of confirmation play in your daily life? What role do they play in your spreading and bearing witness to the faith?

For Further Study

1. CCC 687-747, 1302-1305: the Church’s official teaching on the person of the Holy Spirit. Extremely rich discussion.
2. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World* (1986; available at www.vatican.va); a rich meditation on the role of the Holy Spirit. Not an easy read, but rewarding.
3. Yves Congar, O.P. *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (3 vols.; New York: Crossroad, 1997). A classic study of the history and theology of the Holy Spirit; although a long and advanced study, extremely rich and rewarding read for those interested in the role of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of the Church.
4. Edith Barnecut, *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels Year A* (New York: New City Press, 1992), 72-73.

Pentecost

(Year A)

<i>First Reading</i>	Acts 2:1-11
<i>Response</i>	When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Go therefore and make disciples of all nations; I am with you always, to the close of the age.
<i>Gospel</i>	John 20:19-23

The second reading for the Solemnity of Pentecost in year A comes from a very famous passage in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. It's a passage that's often described as being about the charismatic gifts, these special gifts of the Holy Spirit that God uses to build up the Church. And the passage is from 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13. Now, in the lectionary, it skips over verses 8-11, but in my reading of it, I want to actually include those verses because they're helpful for understanding the context, as well as the concrete examples of the charismatic gifts that Paul's referring to in this particular reading. So let's begin in 1 Corinthians 12:3. Paul says this:

...no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

And here's the passage where the lectionary skips over, but I'm going to include it. It says this:

To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by

the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Now the lectionary picks up:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.¹

Okay, so that's the end of the reading for today. And of course, you can already see that on the feast on Pentecost—on the Solemnity of Pentecost—what are we celebrating? We're celebrating the day when the Holy Spirit comes down upon the apostles and disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem, fills them with the Holy Spirit, descends upon them in tongues as of fire, and the Church (in its present form) is born. It's often referred to as the birthday of the Church, Pentecost is. So it's fitting that on the feast of Pentecost, on this Solemnity, the Church would give us a passage from the letters of Paul that's specifically focused on the agency, the action, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the one Body of Christ, in the Church.

So with that in mind, there are a few aspects of this particular reading that stand out. The first one is the statement that:

...no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

So, this is a kind of fundamental principle of Catholic theology, but it's always worth reiterating. Namely, that even the grace of conversion itself—by which a person turns away from sin and turns to God and confesses that Jesus Christ isn't just the Messiah but the Lord, the divine Son of God—even that movement of

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

repentance, conversion, confession, is something that is a gift. It's a gift of grace itself. So, a person's very faith and confession of Jesus as the Messiah has its origins in the gift of the Holy Spirit, in the grace of the Holy Spirit moving a person's will, moving their heart to believe and to accept the truth of who Jesus is and what He's come to accomplish. That's the first point.

With that in mind, however, Paul quickly moves to specific gifts of the Holy Spirit—not just the initial grace of conversion or repentance or forgiveness, but also specific graces, special graces...which the Greek word here for these “gifts” is *charisma*. We get the English word “charismatic” or even the English word “charisma” from that. And these charismatic gifts, these special gifts of the Holy Spirit are distinct from the basic gift of salvation or forgiveness of sins. And one of the reasons I've read the verses that are skipped by the lectionary is because I think it's actually helpful for exemplifying what Paul's talking about when he talks about the *charismata*, the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, to see some specific concrete examples.

So in this catalog of charismatic gifts, Paul mentions a few: wisdom, knowledge, service, faith, gifts of healing, workings of miracles, the gift of prophecy, the ability to distinguish between spirits. In some older translations, you'll actually find here the discernment of spirits—which if you think of St. Ignatius of Loyola and his famous spiritual exercises, he has a whole section at the end of the exercises on the discernment of spirits. And what Ignatius means by that is the ability to distinguish between the kind of spiritual temptations and trials that a person faces in the early stages of spiritual life—the purgative way, as he calls it—and the ability to recognize different kinds of temptations in later stages of the spiritual life, like the illuminative way. So Ignatius means discernment of spirits. He has a very specific reference. But that language that he gets actually comes from 1 Corinthians 12 here.

Now what Paul means exactly by that is actually a little obscure. It's a little debated. But it's some kind of ability to recognize the difference between different kinds of spirits, whether good or evil spirits. And then he also mentions the interpretation of tongues and the gift of tongues. Now this one is particularly apropos to the feast of Pentecost, because if you'll recall, in the book of Acts

chapter 2 that describes the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles at Pentecost, it says that they began speaking in tongues.

And there's a long debate about exactly how to interpret that. But at the very basic level—on its most basic level—what's happening here is that the apostles are able to speak in such a way that they're understood by the people of the different languages, races, and tongues from around the world who have gathered for the feast of Weeks, the feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem, which was a Jewish festival in the spring that culminated after Passover.

So it's a little unfortunate—although I don't get to make these decisions—that these verses are eliminated from the lectionary, because this is really the link, the clearest link, between what Paul is describing here and what happens in Acts. So the Holy Spirit gives the Church the gift of languages, the gift of tongues, so that the Gospel can be understood not just by the Jewish people, not just by the Hebrew people, but by all the peoples of the world whether they be from Africa or Asia Minor or Europe or Gall—whatever it might be, wherever they're coming from in the Roman Empire—they are now, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, able to hear the Good News of salvation. So that's another gift of the Spirit. That's another one of the charismatic gifts.

And then finally, the last part of the reading for today, you'll notice it says:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

So notice here, there are really two parts of the reading for today. The first part focuses on specific gifts of the Holy Spirit—whether it be miracles or prophecy or healing or the discernment of spirits or the gift of tongues or the interpretation of tongues—that are meant for building up the Body of Christ, building up the Church...the Church's mission in the world as we see, which begins on Pentecost.

But Paul also mentions here the grace of conversion itself, the grace of Baptism—the fundamental gift of sanctifying grace, that makes a person a member of the Body of Christ, which is Paul’s distinctive. — it’s unique to him — it’s his distinctive image for the Church. It’s very common for us to talk about the Church as the Body of Christ, as the mystical Body of Christ—of which all Christians are members. But we sometimes forget that that’s only Paul. It’s only Paul who uses that image to describe the Church as the Body of Christ.

So here Paul’s talking about the grace of Baptism, which also takes place through the Holy Spirit, by which we’re united not just to Christ but to one another...so that whether we’re Jews or Greeks—Paul says here—slaves or free men (which are two of the major categories in the first century in the Roman Empire), we are all now one in the Body of Christ through the power, the unifying power, of the Holy Spirit. So you can see real easily why this is such a fitting reading for the feast of Pentecost.

Now I’d like to close out our discussion with a couple of key quotations, though, from the *Catechism* that are really helpful for understanding the passage that we’ve just read...and for understanding the theological distinction between what the Church refers to as sanctifying grace and charismatic graces. So in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 768, we read these words. This is in the section of the *Catechism* on the Holy Spirit, the article of the Creed “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” And it says this:

So that she can fulfill her mission, the Holy Spirit “bestows upon [the Church] varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs her.”²

So you’ll see there, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* quoting the Second Vatican Council, is talking about the reality of these charismatic gifts. And that’s drawing directly on the language of gift, *charisma*, that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 12. Now what exactly are these charismatic gifts? Well, in paragraph 2003, the *Catechism* gives a little bit more detail, and I think this is a really helpful paragraph for understanding the nature and the distinction—not the separation but

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par 768

the distinction—between the different gifts of the Holy Spirit. So this is what the *Catechism* says about grace:

Grace is first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us. But grace also includes the gifts that the Spirit grants us to associate us with his work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church. There *are sacramental graces*, gifts proper to the different sacraments. There are furthermore *special graces*, also called *charisms* after the Greek term used by St. Paul and meaning “favor,” “gratuitous gift,” “benefit.” Whatever their character—sometimes it is extraordinary, such as the gift of miracles or of tongues—charisms are oriented toward sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good of the Church. They are at the service of charity which builds up the Church.³

Alright, so notice there: the way the *Catechism* is distinguishing between these two is simple but really profound. In the Sacrament of Baptism (and other sacraments), we receive sanctifying grace. This is the grace that’s ordered properly toward our own sanctification, i.e. our own becoming holy—our justification, as it also uses there, which means being forgiven of sins and becoming a member of the Body of Christ...being set apart from Original Sin or mortal sin and being set apart for Christ as a member of His Body. Those are sanctifying graces, like we receive in Baptism.

But in addition to sanctifying grace, the Holy Spirit also operates in the soul of the Christian by giving them special charismatic graces that are not ordered primarily toward our own sanctification or salvation but toward the salvation of others—toward the mission of the Church in evangelization. And those charismatic graces, as the *Catechism* says, sometimes they can be extraordinary, like the gift of miracles or the gift of tongues. So if you think about in the context of Pentecost in the book of Acts, the gifts of performing miracles and the gift of tongues are specifically evangelical charisms. In other words, they’re ordered toward the conversion of others, especially the pagan world. So as the Gospel goes out into

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par 2003

the pagan world, one of the things that miracles and tongues are going to function as are signs of the supernatural character of the Gospel. They're signs that the Church isn't just a human institution, but it's a divine institution.

In fact, in St. Gregory the Great, in his *Dialogues*—this is Pope Gregory the Great writing the 6th century. In his famous work of *Dialogues*, which is a kind of category of the various miracles of the saints, he's very clear about this...that miracles are extraordinary graces of the Holy Spirit that function primarily as witnesses to outsiders, as signs to unbelievers like the pagan world, that Christianity is a supernatural religion. However, there are also somewhat less flashy or fantastic or extraordinary charismatic gifts like faith or wisdom or knowledge or the discernment of spirits. These also serve—think here how wisdom or knowledge would serve in the catechetical mission of the Church, building up the Body of Christ by having the wisdom and the knowledge to explain the faith to teach others. That too is a charismatic gift of the Holy Spirit that's not ordered primarily toward your or my personal salvation, but toward the salvation of others.

So as we bring this study to a close, I just invite you to consider what the *Catechism* is saying here and ask yourself the question: When did I receive sanctifying grace? Well, it would be through the grace of Baptism primarily...but through other sacraments as well, the Eucharist, Confession. But also: What are the particular charismatic gifts, what are the special graces Christ has given to me in order for me to participate in the mission of the Church? Because the missionary outreach of the Church isn't something that's just limited to priests and bishops and consecrated religious. Every single baptized Christian was made to drink of that one Spirit. And you and I have not just received sanctifying graces...we've also received special charismatic graces that are ordered toward the salvation of those around us. So discerning what those gifts might be, what particular gifts you might have and how you can utilize those gifts in the service of the Church and Her Mission and salvation of others is a very important part of becoming a full member (so to speak) of the mystical Body of Christ, as Paul says here in 1 Corinthians 12.

The Charismatic Gifts (Pentecost, Year A)

1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13

³ [N]o one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

[⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of *wisdom*, and to another the utterance of *knowledge* according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another *faith* by the same Spirit, to another gifts of *healing* by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of *miracles*, to another *prophecy*, to another *the ability to distinguish between spirits*, to another various kinds of *tongues*, to another *the interpretation of tongues*. ¹¹ All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.]

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13)

1. Holy Spirit: “no one” can say Jesus is “Lord” (Greek *kyrios*) except by Spirit (12:3)

2. Gifts: varieties of “gifts” (Greek *charisma*) (12:4)

3. Individual Gifts:

- a. Wisdom
- b. Knowledge
- c. Faith
- d. Healing
- e. Miracles
- f. Prophecy
- g. “Discernment of Spirits” (Greek *diakriseōs pneumatōn*) (12:10)
- h. Tongues (cf. Acts 2:6, 11)
- i. Interpretation of Tongues

4. Baptism: by one “Spirit” we were all “baptized” (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Acts 1:5)

The Catechism on Charismatic Gifts

So that she can fulfill her mission, the Holy Spirit “bestows upon [the Church] varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs her.” (CCC 768)

Grace is first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us. But grace also includes the gifts that the Spirit grants us to associate us with his work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church. There are *sacramental graces*, gifts proper to the different sacraments. There are furthermore *special graces*, also called *charisms* after the Greek term used by St. Paul

and meaning “favor,” “gratuitous gift,” “benefit.” Whatever their character—sometimes it is extraordinary, such as the gift of miracles or of tongues—charisms are oriented toward sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good of the Church. They are at the service of charity which builds up the Church. (CCC 2003)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (The Ascension of Jesus, Year A)

1. According to Paul, what are the special “gifts” of the Spirit?

2. According to the Catechism, what role do the charismatic gifts play in the life and mission of the Church?

For Further Reading

1. George T. Montague, S.M. *First Corinthians*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011.