



# What's What

*A weekly communication that provides an opportunity for our faith community to grow together in faith.*

## History of Pentecost

The Easter season lasts for 50 days, ending with *Pentecost* (Greek *pentekoste*, "fiftieth"). Ranking second only to Easter, the feast of Pentecost must be understood in the context of the Jewish feast by the same name. Its other name in Jewish tradition is Feast of Weeks, a full season of seven weeks of thanksgiving beginning with Passover Sabbath (see Tobit 2:1; 2 Maccabees 12:32). This prolonged festival celebrated the theme of harvest and thanksgiving. It evolved before the time of Christ into a memorial of the covenant and, by 300 C.E., a memorial of the giving of the Law.

By the end of the 2nd century, Christians were observing a similar fifty-day festival of rejoicing after the annual [celebration of Easter]. People

prayed standing, and fasting was prohibited. It seems that originally the followers of Jesus continued to observe the Jewish festival, a time of "first fruits" (see 1 Cor 16:8, 15:20, 23) rather than a distinctly new theme. During these weeks, fasting and kneeling were forbidden because of the joyful experience of resurrection.

By the late 4th century, the feast of the Ascension was celebrated in some parts of the church on the fortieth day after Easter (see Acts 1:3, 9-11). Originally, this mystery of the ending of Jesus' visible presence among his followers seems to have been observed as part of the outpouring of the Spirit on the 50th day, or Pentecost...

The weekdays between the Ascension and Pentecost are a preparation period for the

outpouring of the Spirit. It is popularly called the Pentecost Novena (see Acts 1:14).

Pentecost itself closes out the Easter season. It celebrates the overwhelming experience of God pouring out the Spirit upon the first community of those who believed Jesus was the Lord and Christ (see Acts 2:1-4). Pentecost is called, therefore, the birth of the church or the birth of the church's mission.

The color of vestments and decorations for Pentecost is red. It symbolizes the intense love and fire of the Holy Spirit. Other symbols of the Pentecost event are the dove (see Luke 3:21-22), the tongues of flame (see Acts 2:1-4), and wind (see Acts 2:2).

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### Things to talk about:

- Describe "filled with the Holy Spirit".
- What is the Gospel writer John saying when he writes, "he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'"?
- In what ways are you and our parish like the disciples before Pentecost? How are we like the disciples after Pentecost?
- For me, the relationship between receiving Christ's Spirit and forgiveness is...
- What Pentecost customs would you like to take part in?

## Cultural Customs of Pentecost

In some cultures the Feast of Pentecost is also known as *Whitsunday*, so called because of the white garments that were worn by those to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. Over the past 1,500 years, many other cultural traditions have developed. Here are just a few:

\*In many cultures, the night before Pentecost, like the Easter vigil, is thought to be one of the most blessed nights of the year. People go up mountains in the early morning to pray and "catch

the Holy Spirit".

\*In Italy it used to be customary to drop rose petals from the balconies of churches to recall the tongues of fire that came to rest on the disciples. This has resulted in people referring to Pentecost as *Pascha rosatum* in parts of Italy. It is also called *Pascha rossa*, which references the red vestments worn on this day.

\*In France, trumpets were blown during the Mass to recall the sound of the "strong driving wind" which

filled the house where the disciples were.

\*Traditions in parts of Germany include banquets that are held (*Pfingtgelage*) and a Pentecost Bride that is chosen (*Pfingstbraut*). The red peony is designated the "Rose of Pentecost" (*Pfingstrose*) and the oriole is known as the Pentecost bird (*Pfingstvogel*) because of his late arrival near the time of Pentecost. Many of the old churches in the alps have a hole cut in the ceiling above the high altar through which

a "Holy Ghost Dove" is let down into the church during Mass.

\*Pentecost has become known as a time for flowers and fruition because it is seen as the completion of redemption. It is called *The Green Holyday* by people in Poland and the Ukraine, *The Flower Feast* in Germany, and *The Summer Feast* in Czechoslovakia. In Russia people carry flowers and green branches in their hands.



## A Pentecost Sermon from St. Augustine

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

The happy day has dawned for us on which Holy Church makes her first radiant appearance to the eyes of faith and sets the hearts of believers on fire. It is the day on which we celebrate the sending of the Holy Spirit by our Lord Jesus Christ, after he had risen from the dead and ascended into glory.

In the gospel it is written: *If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water shall flow from his heart.*

The Evangelist explains these words by adding: *Jesus said this about the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive. For the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.*

Now the glorification of Jesus took place when he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, but all was not yet accomplished. The Holy Spirit still had to be given; the one who made the promise had to send him.

This is precisely what occurred at Pentecost.

After being in the company of his disciples for the forty days following his resurrection, the Lord ascended into heaven, and on the fiftieth day—the day we are now celebrating—he sent the Holy Spirit. The account is given in Scripture:



*Suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and there appeared to them tongues like fire which separated and came to rest on each one of them.*

*And they began to speak in other tongues, as the Holy Spirit gave them power of utterance.*

That wind cleansed the disciples' hearts, blowing away fleshly thoughts like so much chaff. The fire burnt up their unregenerate desires as if they were straw.

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 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, each with its own peculiar speech which was unintelligible to the rest of the world.

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.

Like the limbs of a single body, the separated members of the human race would be restored to unity by being joined to Christ, their common head, and welded into the oneness of a holy body by the fire of love.

Anyone therefore who rejects the gift of peace and withdraws from the fellowship of this unity cuts himself off from the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So then, my fellow members of Christ's body, you are the fruits of unity and the children of peace. Keep this day with joy, celebrate it in freedom of spirit, for in you is fulfilled what was foreshadowed in those days when the Holy Spirit came.

At that time whoever received the Holy Spirit spoke in many languages, individual though he was. Now in the same way unity itself speaks through all nations in every tongue.

If you yourselves are established in that unity you have the Holy Spirit among you, and nothing can separate you from the Church of Christ which speaks in the language of every nation of the world.

*(Sermon 271:PL 38, 1245-1246)*

### Want to know more?

Would you like to know more about Pentecost? Check out the following books and websites for more information:

- Readings of Pentecost: Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-31, 34; 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23
- The first Pentecost story: [www.americancatholic.org/Features/Easter/0-86716-246-5.asp](http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/Easter/0-86716-246-5.asp)
- [www.liturgy.slu.edu/PentecostA051108/main.html](http://www.liturgy.slu.edu/PentecostA051108/main.html)
- Your Sunday Reader Podcast for 5/11/08: [www.sundayprep.blogspot.com](http://www.sundayprep.blogspot.com)

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"What's What" is a publication of the Youth Ministry Department of St Mary, Canandaigua, and St Bridget, Bloomfield.

Our Youth Ministry Mission Statement [Draft]:

Building on the mission of our parishes to follow the way of Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and to make Christ more fully present in all who live within our community, the Youth Ministry mission is to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today; to affirm the gifts of our youth and provide opportunities for young people to share their gifts with the larger community; and to meet the religious, spiritual and social needs of all youth with the committed leadership, guidance and support of our parish family, providing an opportunity for our entire faith community to grow together in Christian faith.