

SUNDAY *to* SUNDAY

FACT OF FAITH PENTECOST



Each year, the Church celebrates fifty days of Easter, culminating at the Feast of Pentecost. Pentecost marks the occasion of God's sending the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' disciples after his Resurrection. Before Pentecost, the disciples were unsure of what they were to do

next and spent most of their time in hiding. After Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit, they understood their mission to spread the Good News of Jesus, and they had the courage to come out of hiding and speak openly about who Jesus was and what he had accomplished by his dying and rising.

Because Pentecost brought the disciples this clarity of mission, it is regarded as the founding feast of the Christian Church. Before Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus are tentative and disorganized. After Pentecost, they are a people with a mission who perceive themselves as spiritually and sacramentally connected to the Risen Christ. You can read the story of the Church's first days in the Acts of the Apostles.

Today, celebrations of Pentecost still center on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and on the power of those gifts to both draw people together and to send them forth to spread the Word. For those of you who—like me—are fond of making lists, those gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, knowledge, understanding, fortitude, good counsel, piety, and fear of the Lord.

Of course, one of the remarkable elements of the story of the first Pentecost was the miracle of understanding, in which everyone in the diverse crowd in Jerusalem hears the disciples speaking in the listener's own language. This unique event is sometimes commemorated at Masses for Pentecost Sunday by having people read sections of the story in a variety of different languages represented in the congregation. It's a reminder that, although we've heard the story before, we have inherited the mission of those first disciples.

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CATECHETICAL CORNER THE SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Confirmation, together with Baptism and Eucharist, form the Sacraments of Initiation that are all intimately connected. In the

Sacrament of Confirmation, the baptized person is "sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit" and is strengthened for service to the Body of Christ.

The prophets of the Old Testament foretold that God's Spirit would rest upon the Messiah to sustain his mission. Their prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus the Messiah was conceived by the Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus on the occasion of his baptism by John. Jesus' entire mission occurred in communion with the Spirit. Before he died, Jesus promised that the Spirit would be given to the Apostles and to the entire Church. After his death, he was raised by the Father in the power of the Spirit.

The New Testament reports many manifestations of the Holy Spirit, two of which we note here. St. John's Gospel describes an outpouring of the Spirit on Easter night when Jesus breathed on the



Apostles and said, "Receive the holy Spirit" (Jn 20:22). St. Luke's Acts of the Apostles gives another account of the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, fifty days after the Resurrection of Christ (cf. Acts 2). Filled with the Holy Spirit, the Apostles proclaimed God's mighty deeds. Peter preached that this coming of the Spirit fulfilled the prophecy of Joel: "In the last days . . . I will pour out a portion of my spirit / upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17; cf. Jl 3:1).

Those who believed in the Apostles' preaching were baptized and received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. The Apostles baptized believers in water and the Spirit. Then they imparted the special gift of the Spirit through the laying on of hands. "The imposition of hands is rightly recognized by the Catholic tradition as the origin of the sacrament of Confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church" (CCC, no. 1288, citing Pope Paul VI, *Divinae Consortium Naturae*, no. 659).

By the second century, Confirmation was also conferred by anointing with holy oil, which came to be called sacred Chrism. "This anointing highlights the name 'Christian,' which means 'anointed' and derives from that of Christ himself whom God 'anointed with the Holy Spirit'" (CCC, no. 1289, citing Acts 10:38).

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