

## **Pentecost**

Today is the Feast of Pentecost. The color for Pentecost is red. If we were having a service in the church today, the color on the altar would be red. It signifies the Holy Spirit; it signifies fire!

Today we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. There came a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and there appeared what seemed to be tongues of fire which rested on each of them and they were inspired, and they began to preach the gospel, each in a language which reached one of the various groups who were assembled at the temple for the festival of Pentecost. Three thousand souls were converted that day.

What an extraordinary turnaround! The Apostles spoke with boldness and with power. A miraculous change took place in them. It was the power of the Holy Spirit. That made all the difference.

They had been with the Lord three years. He had taught continuously during this time. But had his instruction produced a godly transformation in them? No, they failed to understand what he was saying most of the time. (See, e.g., John 10:6) And despite what he said, their old nature continued to dog them. They argued over who was the greatest. (Luke 9:46) They maneuvered to secure the best positions in the kingdom for themselves. You may recall the story of the mother of James and John coming to Jesus, with her sons, and imploring Jesus to agree to give her sons the two preferred seats in the kingdom, one at his right hand and the other at his left. (Matthew 20:20-21)

The disciples had observed the Lord during all this time that he was with them. But did they follow his example? No, they failed at doing the things he did. (Matthew 17:16) They doubted him. (Matthew 14:31; 28:17) They passed the buck when a difficult problem or situation arose. (Matthew 14:5-17)

After he died and rose from the dead, they hid themselves away behind closed doors. They did not speak out. They toyed with the idea of abandoning the Way of the Lord and going back to their former occupations. (John 21:3)

The Lord's teaching, his mighty example, his death and resurrection, his ascension to heaven - in their very presence – none of these produced in the Apostles the zeal, the enthusiasm for the work of spreading the gospel. Even the giving of the Great Commission, in and of itself, produced no spark in the Apostles. It took the coming of the Holy Spirit to bring about this miraculous change in them.

With the celebration of Pentecost, we have reached what in dramatic literature would be called the denouement, the climax, of the salvation story, the coming of the Holy Spirit. Everything has been building toward this event. All too often we tend to stop at Easter, and view Pentecost as an afterthought. But Jesus did not treat it as such.

Jesus told his disciples on the night of the Last Supper, exactly what they were to expect. He was betrayed into the hands of men. He was going away. They would no longer have him as their teacher, but he would send the Holy Spirit to be their guide and strengthener, their helper.

He told them, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live." (John 14:15-19)

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will

teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe." (John 14:25-29)

"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." (John 15:26-27)

"I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." (John 16:7)

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:13-14)

The sending of the Holy Spirit was the last step in the plan of salvation. It had been a part of God the Father's plan from the very beginning. It was this event that gave rise to Christ's church. The Apostles, were energized, animated, brought to life by the coming of the Holy Spirit, to spread the gospel, to midwife the birth of the church.

We are living in the age of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is our guide and comforter, too. The Holy Spirit is God, just as God the Father is God and God the Son is God. Three persons, one God.

In the evangelical church, it seems that the Holy Spirit is not spoken of very much. The principal focus is on Jesus. God the Father is second, and the Holy Spirit a sometimes distant third. But these three are co-equal. They are consubstantial. The Holy Spirit is God with us, now.

The Pentecostal church is one branch of the church which places an emphasis on the Holy Spirit, although this is manifested today chiefly in the speaking of tongues. Whatever your view of speaking in tongues, which in today's practice means private, individualistic languages, rather than languages commonly in use by groups of people, as was the case at Pentecost, it must be conceded that for Pentecostals, the Holy Spirit is revered and sought after. I am not a proponent of speaking in tongues (adopting Paul's view that "in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue," 1 Corinthians 14:19), but I have to admit that I have some admiration for the earnest desire of the Pentecostal church to seek the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit.

With the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, there was kindled in them a fire, an enthusiasm (dunamis in the Greek, a word from which we get the word "dynamite). Today's church could do with a little dynamite!

Peter, that vacillating disciple of the Lord, who was sometimes hot and sometimes cold, sometimes on the mark, and sometimes missing it entirely, sometimes strong in faith, and sometimes willing to chuck it all and go back to fishing, on the Day of Pentecost gave an impassioned address to the crowd about the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, and from then on until his death, was stalwart for the Lord.

What difference has the Holy Spirit made in your life? I can testify that he has made all the difference in my life. I don't know where or what I would be without the Holy Spirit and the church. We need to share our stories with others, and we need to be continually seeking the direction and help of God's Holy Spirit.

Are you still seeking the direction of the Holy Spirit in your life? Have you consulted with him lately about what he would have you do? Many of us who are older don't have the energy and drive that we had when we were younger Christians. We can't do as much as we used to do. But let us never lose the enthusiasm – the enthusiasm for life, for the Lord, for his work of redemption, for the faith, for the church of Jesus Christ.

Pentecost is an annual wake-up call for us, to get in touch with the Lord anew through the working of the Holy Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit is, in the words of the Creed, the “Lord and giver of life.” While we have breath, let us ever seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit and with fire!