

Feast of Pentecost
Year A

Acts 2:1-21
Psalm 104:25-35, 37
1 Corinthians 12:3b-13
John 20:19-23

The day of Pentecost had come. What was this day and is that connected to the fact that thousands of Jews from all over the Roman Empire were gathered in Jerusalem? Pentecost was one of the festivals in the Jewish calendar that required faithful Jews to travel to Jerusalem. This was the fiftieth day after the Feast of the Unleavened Bread during the Passover and was originally a harvest festival, the offering of the first grain in the Temple. From early years, it had also been commemorated as the day when Moses received the Law at Sinai. Therefore, it is not surprising that so many Jews were present.

Because of the events described in this reading from Acts, the Church has appropriated this day as marking the beginnings of the church. With the success of Peter's sermon, with some 3000 being baptized, this is a logical place to pin the beginning of this movement. However, I believe we should look at another reading to find the true beginning of the Church.

In the reading from John's Gospel, we hear of Jesus appearing to the disciples on the day of His resurrection. He enters the room where the disciples were hiding behind locked doors and, breathing on them, told them to receive the Holy Spirit. It was at this point that Jesus commissioned them to forgive and retain sins. It was in this act that Jesus was calling His disciples to continue the work He had begun. The coming of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts was just the fire these people needed to get them moving. This was the impetus Jesus promised them which emboldened them to go into all the world.

In what way did this outpouring of the Spirit provide the early church the power they needed to be successful? Paul lays this out in his letter to the church in Corinth. According to Paul, there are a wide variety of gifts given to the church by God through the Holy Spirit. Each of these gifts has a purpose and that is the lifting up of the believers. The problem that the Corinthians had was each felt the gift he manifested was his, for his personal edification. Paul reminded them that these were gifts from God for the sole purpose of helping the entire church in its mission. This was the power the Spirit gave the early church to succeed in its mission.

We do not talk much about these gifts today. Why not? Has God withdrawn these gifts from us? Do we no longer need them? Some might argue that we need these gifts more today than ever before, given all that we face in the world today.

God has not abandoned the church. God has not withdrawn the Spirit. The Spirit of God is still working in the church today as much as it was in the first century. Looking at this list of gifts Paul provides, we can point to their manifestation all around us. We do see the working of miracles, gifts of healing, and discerning of spirits. We might not give them those names, but we see the results. When we claim those gifts and the manifestation of those gifts, the church is built

up. It is when we deny the working of the Spirit within us that we deprive the church, and those around us, of that blessing.

God is alive and well in our midst. I hear comments from you that confirm that belief. You tell of the times Jesus has been with you in the dark places of your life. You tell of the experiences of strength or comfort when you seek God. We all rejoice when we hear of the great miracles that happen in lives of our families. These are proofs that the Spirit which was poured out on the church on that morning of Pentecost is still active in the world today.