



**Contributed by Father Paul Voisin, C.R.**

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**FEAST OF PENTECOST**  
**May 23, 2021**

**GATHERING TIME**  
*(10-15 Minutes)*

**Introduction to the Word:**

During what we call the 'Cold War', the Communists in East Berlin constructed a giant television tower that was intended to be a showpiece of Communist engineering to the people of West Berlin. Near the top of the tower, a revolving restaurant was built, also to impress the people of the west. However, what they didn't realize was that when the sun hit the tower in a particular way it looked like a huge, shimmering cross. This was not their intention! They tried to paint the cross, to dim the glow, but without success. Their trophy of Communist engineering was now an embarrassment.

Very often during the history of the world, individuals, groups and nations have attempted to make the influence of Jesus Christ, and Christians, disappear.

The Feast of Pentecost is often called the 'birthday' of the Church. On this Feast of Pentecost we celebrate that these attempts have failed, and that the Church continues to exist and that people of faith continue to live happy and fulfilling lives, that the work of the Church continues to contribute to the well-being of others (in particular in education and health care, as examples).

**Warm-up Activity** *(about 8-10 minutes):*

On this birthday of the Church, it is good to reflect on what the Church – the people of God – means to us, and how we form a part of it. The Holy Spirit, which we received in our Baptism and in the Sacrament of Confirmation, is with us, and gives us life to live in union with the Father and the Son.

- a) How do I feel that my life is impacted by the Holy Spirit?
- b) How do I bear witness to the Lord Jesus, with the grace of the Holy Spirit?

## The Table of the Word

I have happy memories of growing up in a very child-friendly neighbourhood in Waterloo (Ontario). Hillcrest Avenue had only sixteen homes, and each household had at least one child. In the early years, the birthday of one of the children became a party for (almost) all of the neighbourhood children. There were simple games, and a light meal of sandwiches or hot dogs, and a cake with ice cream. Gifts were usually practical and moderately priced. There may have been balloons at some of the parties, but a type of celebration unlike many of the extravaganzas of today's birthday parties.

One of the 'graces' of this kind of neighbourhood experience was the feeling of belonging, of being accepted and cared about. As we got older, many summer evenings would find us – boys and girls of all ages – at Our Lady of Lourdes School playground, at the end of the street, for a baseball game. Even though you may not have been a 'strong' hitter or catcher, you were still chosen and included in the community/neighbourhood activity. Even though you may not have been the first chosen, even the last was given their turn at bat and out in the field or on a base.

Such experiences help us to understand what it means to 'belong', to be a part of a group (beyond the family). As we celebrate the 'birthday' of the Church on Pentecost it is an occasion to reflect on our belonging to the Church – whatever our condition or circumstance. Just as we often may have fumbled the ball on that playground, we also 'fumble' in our following of Christ, failing to faithfully live as Christ calls us to, and as the Holy Spirit motivates us to. Just as not everyone hits a home run, every 'hit' – every act of love and service – is a contribution to the Body of Christ. That base run may even bring someone else to home plate; our effort may help someone else to 'cross the plate' and come closer to Jesus. Just as we may drop the ball (literally) and disappoint the team, we may 'drop the ball' (figuratively) in following Christ, yet still be a part of the Church, being forgiven for our error(s).

### **Penitential Rite:**

The Holy Spirit brings us into union with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit has many names, and one of them is the 'Advocate'. Today we understand about advocacy, and, indeed, it is the Holy Spirit who is on our side and is our voice when we cannot find our own voice.

**Lord Jesus,** You have sent the Holy Spirit upon us,

**Lord, have mercy.**

**Christ Jesus,** You are the Lord, our Saviour,

**Christ, have mercy.**

**Lord Jesus,** May we bring Your peace to the world,

**Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray:

Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
enlighten our minds to perceive the mysteries of the universe in relation to eternity.

Spirit of right judgment and courage, guide us  
and make us firm in our baptismal decision to follow Jesus' way of love.

Spirit of knowledge and reverence,  
help us to see the lasting value of justice and mercy  
in our everyday dealings with one another.

May we respect life as we work to solve problems  
of family and nation, economy and ecology.

Spirit of God, spark our faith, hope and love into new action each day.

Fill our lives with wonder and awe  
in your presence which penetrates all creation. Amen.

*(author unknown)*

## **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME** (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering word, and that God is present in the word proclaimed. This is the word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the small Christian community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

### **FIRST READING** (*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 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 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. **Thanks be to God.**

### **SECOND READING** (*1 Corinthians 7:12-15*)

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 is 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

**Thanks be to God**

### **GOSPEL** (*John 20:19-23*)

On the evening of the 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. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

## COMMENTARY:

In our First Reading we hear about the first Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon those gathered there. There was a dramatic physical manifestation of the Spirit, the wind and the tongues of fire. The other dramatic manifestation was their praising of God in various languages. In the Jewish faith there was already a feast called Pentecost, celebrated fifty days after Passover. Thus, there were Jews from all over that part of the world in Jerusalem at this time. Each of the people who came into contact with the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, heard the praise of God in their own language, much to their surprise. There were various languages, but one message, in praise of God and witnessing to God. This has an uncanny parallel in the Old Testament with the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:4-9). Here, too, there was a manifestation of people speaking a multitude of languages, but it did not bring unity, rather confusion and chaos, and was seen as a punishment, because the building of the Tower of Babel was seen as an affront to God, as a sign that humanity was so great and powerful that they did not need God.

Our Second Reading continues the theme of the body of Christ from the previous week, that Jesus “is the head of all”. St. Paul’s analogy of the body reminds us that we are one in Christ, and that the Spirit will be made manifest in each one of us in a unique and personal way. God has not made us with cookie-cutters, and we are each unique in our gifts and talents. Through the Holy Spirit, and its gifts, that life of God is made manifest in and through us in a unique way. Our spiritual gifts are different, and complement each other. Once again, there is unity in the Spirit, not division or chaos.

In our gospel the fear felt by the early disciples was another example of the forces of evil to stamp out the Christian faith. Yet, Jesus comes to them, and the first thing He says to them – as He often did – was “Peace be with you”. In the midst of their turmoil and fear, He wished them peace. Often in the appearances of the resurrected Lord, the disciples were behind closed doors, “for fear of the Jews”. The Jewish authorities – including Saul of Tarsus (who we later know as Paul, the Apostle) – wanted to stamp out this band of the man they had crucified. His followers said that He had risen from the dead, which made this Jesus, and His followers, all the more dangerous to the security of Roman peace in Palestine. Allowing these Christians to run wild and share their doctrine might bring down the heavy hand of the Romans upon them, so at all cost the religious leaders wanted to eliminate these Christians and their influence on the life of the people in Palestine. The coming of the Holy Spirit, and the courage that came from it, would not allow the Jewish authorities or the Romans to stamp out their mission. In our time and our place there are still efforts being made to make Christianity and Christ disappear. The most frequent used term is ‘secularization’. According to an online dictionary, ‘secularization’ means ‘to separate from religious or spiritual connection or influences; make worldly or unspiritual’. This is indeed a threat to our culture which has usually been thought of as a Judeo-Christian culture, a culture based on religious values and revealed truth.

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **commentary**  
to identify a newly discovered insight.

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:**

1. “They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11)

The manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the different languages is significant. Although we have not received that ‘gift of tongues’, we are still called to proclaim Christ and cooperate with the “mighty works” of God.

- a) Have I had a ‘Holy Spirit moment’ in my life?
- b) How do I speak for the Holy Spirit with others?

2. “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” (1 Corinthians 7:12-15)

God is generous with gifts and talents. St. Paul’s body analogy reminds us that all our individual, unique gifts are to be used together, to complement one another for the kingdom.

- a) What are some of the gifts with which God has blessed me?
- b) How do my gifts complement those of my family, among my friends, or in this group?

3. “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:19-23)

Just as the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles that day of Pentecost, so too we have received that same Spirit. It has a dynamic force in our life, especially when we open ourselves to its grace and power, and are willing to be faithful to the will of the Father.

- a) How have I served God, bringing His peace to others?
- b) Has the spirit of Christ grown in the lives of my family and friends because of my witnessing to the power of the Holy Spirit with them?

## **CARING-PRAYING TIME:** *(15-20 minutes)*

1. **Word of the Week:** “Receive the Holy Spirit”

2. **Suggestions for the Week:**

This week, be more conscious of the presence of Holy Spirit in your life, and how you are responding to that life in you. Begin your day by asking for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and throughout the day –particularly in moments of stress – call upon the Holy Spirit for the graces and virtues that you need at that moment. At the end of the day, recall the ‘Consciousness Examen’ (of Fr. George Aschenbrenner, S.J., here simplified):

- Call upon the Holy Spirit.
- Recognize the times this day that you have been an instrument of the Lord, and give Him thanks.
- Recognize the times this day that you have been an obstacle to the Lord, and ask for forgiveness. Make your intentions for tomorrow, and in particular how to correct that which did not bring glory to God.

### 3. **Intercessions:**

The Holy Spirit is with us in our prayer, helping us to turn to God and express our needs. The Spirit will not fail us.

**That** this Feast of Pentecost will be an occasion for all to renew their appreciation of the Holy Spirit that we have received. We pray ... **Come, Holy Spirit**

**That** those who are preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation will open themselves to this Advocate who is with them. We pray ... **Come, Holy Spirit**

**That** our words and actions may bear witness to the presence of the Holy Spirit, and encourage others to open themselves to God. We pray ... **Come, Holy Spirit**

**That** we may recognize and appreciate the unique gifts of each one, and allow the Holy Spirit to work in us to bring together our efforts for the kingdom. We pray ... **Come, Holy Spirit**

#### **How can we help you in prayer this week?**

Let us pray:

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest,  
and in our hearts take up Thy rest;  
come with thy grace and heavenly aid  
to fill our hearts which thou hast made,  
to fill our hearts which Thou has made.

O Comforter, to thee we cry, Thou heavenly gift of God most high;  
thou fount of life, and fire of love,  
and sweet anointing from above,  
and sweet anointing from above.

O Holy Ghost, through thee alone,  
know we the Father and the Son;  
be this our firm unchanging creed,  
that thou dost from them both proceed,  
that thou dost from them both proceed.

Praise we the Lord, Father and Son, and Holy Spirit with them one;  
and may the Son on us bestow all gifts that from the Spirit flow,  
all gifts that from the Spirit flow,  
all gifts that from the Spirit flow.

*(traditional Hymn)*

**With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one, **OUR FATHER****

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