

Pentecost Sunday
May 28, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

“You shall count until the day after the seventh sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to the Lord.”
(Leviticus 23:16)

Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost. This is the day the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples gathered in the Cenacle—the Upper Room—in the east of the City of Jerusalem. It was on this day, a “violent wind” from heaven filled the room and “tongues of fire . . . rested on each of them”, and “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (vs. 4).

First, a bit of history. Pentecost—meaning fiftieth—dates back to the days of Moses. Fifty days after the Passover, when Moses led God’s people from Egypt, the Children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai. Moses ascended the mountain and returned with God’s law. With that law, God had proclaimed the people celebrate three Pilgrim Festivals during the year: The Festival of Unleavened Bread (Passover); the Festival of Harvest, of the first fruits of their labor (Pentecost); and the Festival of Ingathering (the Feast of Tabernacles). Turning to the Book of Leviticus (23:16), we find the quote at the top of this handout. We read that God set the Feast of Harvest on the day after the seventh Sabbath following the Feast of Unleavened Bread, exactly fifty days. As you may have guessed by now, this was the beginning of what we now call “Pentecost.”

It is on this day that we celebrate the beginning of Christ’s Church on earth. The “first fruits”—the beginning of God’s harvest—came to be on this day. As St. Peter addressed the crowds that gathered at the sound of the “violent wind” from heaven, the first converts—some 3000 people—received the Gift of the Holy Spirit. In the early Church, those first converts proclaimed the entire fifty days following the Resurrection of Christ as Pentecost. Today, we celebrate it on this day only.

The red vestments we wear as we celebrate this day are worn to symbolize the fire of the Holy spirit in our midst. Matthew 3:11 tells us: *I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.* Trained as a shipboard firefighter in the Navy, we were taught that fire is a living, breathing entity. It can be powerful. It is most often unpredictable. Yet, it can come to our aid, cooking our food and warming our homes. We can say the Holy Spirit fits this description. The Holy Spirit is for us the presence of God, dwelling within us, filling us and warming our hearts. Recall the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: *Were not our hearts BURNING within us . . .* And like fire in a furnace can purify, the Holy Spirit works to purify, to cleanse and refine. From the book of Wisdom (3:6): *. . . like gold in a furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt-offering he accepted them.*

But what of the wind that swept through the house that day? The Greek word **Pneuma** means wind, breath, or spirit. Living where we are, we all realize the power of the wind. It can sweep in suddenly, seemingly from nowhere, driving all in its path. The wind signifies activity and a

change to new life. The Holy Spirit, the Breath of God, brings new life. It is sometimes, like the wind, unpredictable in its sweeping movement, stirring the soul to action. And yet, the Holy Spirit can come to us gently, as to Ezekiel, in a still small voice.

All of this and more, happened that day of Pentecost, some 2000 years ago. Let us all, this day of Pentecost, pray for the Breath of God in our lives and the all-consuming fire of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.