

Pentecost  
May 11, 2008

Pentecost is one of the three major feast days of the Church, although somehow, it doesn't seem to have the same appeal to occasional church goers as do Christmas and Easter. But what we often forget is that Pentecost is the birthday of the Church and, even if we say otherwise, birthdays are very important.

We have just heard the story of what happened on that first Christian Pentecost. Do you know why the disciples were gathered together on that particular day? Because they were celebrating the Jewish feast of Pentecost. According to tradition, the Israelites arrived at Mt. Sinai fifty days after they fled Egypt, so in later Judaism, Pentecost (fifty days after Passover) became the occasion to celebrate God's giving of the Law, the establishment of the covenant between God and Israel. So the disciples were gathered to keep that feast of celebration.

As was often the case, the early Church appropriated existing feasts, re-interpreting them through Christian thought and understanding. We even find some of the same imagery. Luke's use of fire and wind is very reminiscent of God's appearance to Moses on Mt. Sinai, but the thrust of Luke's story becomes the transformation of that earlier commemoration to one of immediate reality and power.

Luke makes it abundantly clear that a group of frightened men and women are dramatically changed into people with new enthusiasm, into people who suddenly find voices to boldly proclaim the Good News of the Gospel to anyone and everyone. And what has made that change happen? Clearly, it's the Holy Spirit which has entered their lives in a very real fashion. They suddenly knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that God was present with them and that knowledge gave them the power to act on God's behalf. They now

understood that the Holy Spirit was to be a permanent resource in their lives, in every minute of every day, just as it had been in all of Jesus' ministry. This gift galvanized them to action, empowering them to overcome their fear, to do what they'd never ever thought of doing, to be what they'd never ever thought of being.

That same empowerment is ours through our baptism. And that is why it is so particularly appropriate to have baptisms on this day. Way back when, Easter was the **only** day for baptisms, but as the Church grew, exceptions began to be made. Occasionally there were people who for one reason or another couldn't attend the Easter service and since Pentecost is the wrap-up of the Great Fifty Days of Easter and a special day in itself, it became the alternate date for Christian initiation. The corporate nature of baptism was so important to the early Church that only a major feast day, when the entire body was gathered together could be a suitable alternative to Easter baptism. That, by the way, is the probable source for the alternative name for this day--Whitsunday. A shortening of White Sunday when the newly baptized formed a procession wearing white robes to signify their cleansing from sin and their new life in Christ.

To be baptized is to be in Christ, to be a member of his body and to share the rights and obligations of that common life.

To be baptized means that we have the right to be loved, no matter what we do or who we are and it means that we are obligated to love one another on the same basis.

To be baptized means that we have the right to feed on Christ's body and blood for our strength and sustenance and it means that we are obligated to feed others.

To be baptized means that we have a right to claim and use the

community of faith when we need it and it means that we are obligated to be faithful and of use to the community when we are needed.

To be baptized means that we have been both chosen and called--chosen by God to be God's own and called to be faithful to God. And that means that we must be as fully ourselves as we possibly can be, using our gifts and talents to honor God, living abundantly while celebrating life.

To be baptized means that we've been given God's life-giving Spirit which enables us to reach out and help others to be reborn.

To be baptized is our way of proclaiming the hope that God has for every human life.

To be baptized is a beginning, an entrance into a life of trust, a license to live as a child of God forever.

On this day of Pentecost, we have the privilege and responsibility of welcoming Kai and Asa Williamson who were born on Easter Day, into membership in the body of Christ, into that special relationship of love which can never be broken. They won't remember this day, but they will spend the rest of their lives coming to terms with its implications. As they grow in age and understanding, it will be our responsibility, as their family in Christ, to help them grow into the hopes and promises of this special day.

And so we pray:

O Spirit come! Make us new. Make us servants who serve in Spontaneous freedom and responsibility. Come to your Church, O spirit of Christ. Enflame us with the gentle love of Jesus. O Spirit, come! AMEN

