

5.19.2024 Day of Pentecost

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-26, 16:4b-15

“The Spirit of truth will guide you”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Blessed Pentecost greetings! On Pentecost Day, we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit given to each of us in baptism. Though we pray, “Come, Holy Spirit,” in truth the Spirit already dwells within each of us, always waiting to be fanned into flame.

Pentecost is perhaps my favorite of the major Christian holidays because it celebrates the reality of the Holy Spirit dwelling within me, each of you, and the church. However busy we may become, however indifferent or down we may feel, the Holy Spirit never leaves us. The Spirit is always ready to be kindled into a living flame. Pentecost is about becoming what we are – children of God called beloved and given the gift of the Spirit in baptism.

Yet Pentecost is the least understood of the major Christian holidays. Unlike Christmas and Easter, Pentecost has resisted the world’s commercialization. If you haven’t noticed, there are no Holy Spirit cookies or chocolate Holy Spirit doves. Only once did I see red hot Holy Spirit cinnamon drops! Pentecost is a reminder that Holy Spirit cannot be controlled or manipulated. *The Spirit blows where it chooses.* The Spirit is God’s creative power always sanctifying and always moving ahead of us, guiding us into the truth about God, ourselves, and our neighbor.

I invite you to look at our new Pentecost banner: the color red and the orange-white flame symbolize of the “fire” of the Holy Spirit, while the white dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit that descended upon Jesus at his baptism and upon each of us in ours. Indeed, St. Mark’s font, shaped like a dove, always hovers over the Lord’s table – a reminder that the Holy Spirit dwells in us, leading us outward in mission. The Holy Spirit is the flame of faith that burns in your heart, a sign that God is alive within you.

Today we also use a new “Holy Spirit kite” in the shape of a dove, reminding us that the Holy Spirit is always present above us and always going before us. The Holy Spirit kite reminds us that the Spirit both gathers the church and sends the church outward into the world in service to others.

Genesis describes the Holy Spirit: “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters*” (Gen. 1:1-2). In Hebrew, God’s Spirit is *ruach*, meaning breath, wind and Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God’s breath of life

present from the beginning of time; the Spirit is God's eternal life within you in each breath you take. Your voice and your life become an expression of the life of the Spirit.

In John's gospel, Jesus said to Nicodemus, "*What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit...The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit*" (Jn. 3:6, 8). So it is with you and me. The Holy Spirit dwells in each of us, enabling us to become bearers of the Spirit in this world. Like the two young people who carried the banner and waved the Holy Spirit kite above us, we too become bearers of the Spirit in our lives.

In the Book of Acts, the first Pentecost was a microcosm of the entire world, and the Holy Spirit was given to all who were gathered. All were given the Spirit, and none were excluded. All the nations and regions of the ancient world – Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe – were represented and given the Spirit. O, that our world today would have such an outpouring of the Spirit bringing all people closer together in mutual understanding!

Hearing others speak in their own languages, those gathered on Pentecost asked one another, "*How is it that we hear?*" and "*What does this mean?*" They were amazed and perplexed because amid great differences of distance, language and culture, the Holy Spirit allowed them to listen to and understand one another. This is what is so exciting and challenging about Pentecost: in a world where people increasingly find it difficult to listen to and understand one another, the Spirit encourages humanity to discover new community with one another.

The work of the church begins at Pentecost as the Spirit helps us listen and understand, building bridges and community between people. Amid all of today's differences, misunderstandings, and intolerance the Spirit is given to us so that we might become peacemakers and bridgebuilders of God's love for all humanity.

The world is an increasingly noisy place, and we cannot be peacemakers or bridgebuilders without entering into the silence of prayer. Quieting ourselves in prayer, the Spirit helps us hear and understand God's truth alive within us. The questions asked at the first Pentecost are also our questions: "*How is it that we hear?*" and "*What does this mean?*" The Holy Spirit is God's living power connecting our faith and reason so we might truly understand and know ourselves. The Spirit bridges our faith and reason making us whole and complete that we might also know and understand our neighbors.

In today's gospel, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the "*Spirit of truth*" – "*the Advocate.*" Jesus'

words also remind us of how much “truth” has become an embattled word today. All day, every day, we are bombarded by voices on news outlets, social media, and the internet all seeking to tell us “the truth.” Pundits and leaders often change their versions of the truth, making “truth” a shifting sand.

God is still speaking through the Spirit. As Jesus said, “*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth*” (Jn. 16:12-13). In the quiet of prayer, let the questions of Pentecost guide you, asking, “How is it that I hear and that I understand what is true?” *The Spirit blows where it chooses*, guiding us into the truth and helping us discern what is true and what is good. If we but turn to the Spirit in prayer, we have an Advocate who will guide us into the truth about ourselves, about God, and about this world.

Pentecost points us to the reality of the Spirit that is beyond words. Symbols are powerful because they point to a reality beyond themselves. The symbols on this banner and the Holy Spirit kite point to the reality of the Spirit who guides, discerns and teaches. Yet we must quiet ourselves to enter into this reality. We must listen to understand, and we must live in the Spirit to act with the Spirit.

Life in the Spirit is awakened with God’s word, nourished in the Eucharist, restoring God’s image within us that we might also see God’s image in our neighbor.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness that we might help others. The Spirit searches our hearts revealing our own need of mercy and forgiveness that we might also be merciful and forgiving to others.

Become what you are meant to be – a bearer of the Holy Spirit.

Daily, seek the Advocate, the Spirit of truth, that you might become an advocate for others.  
Amen.