

Pentecost

Year A

GOSPEL

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In the evening of the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you', and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you.'

'As the Father sent me,
so am I sending you.'

After saying this he breathed on them and said:

'Receive the Holy Spirit.
For those whose sins you forgive,
they are forgiven;
for those whose sins you retain,
they are retained.'

(John 20:19–23)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Pentecost was originally a Jewish harvest festival that was celebrated fifty days after the Passover. It was one of the great 'pilgrimage' festivals, which meant that people came to celebrate this feast at the temple. It was for this festival that so many pilgrims were present in Jerusalem on the day when the Spirit was manifested in the lives of the disciples.
- The Christian feast of Pentecost is fifty days after Easter and is the culmination of the Lent–Easter–Pentecost cycle.
- The church teaches that the Holy Spirit brings both gifts and fruits to the faithful (see Sharing the Tradition).

EXPLORING THE WORD

Despite the promise of Jesus that he would not leave his disciples 'orphaned' (see sixth Sunday of Easter), they huddle in fear in the upper room after his death. He comes among them, not offering recriminations at their lack of faith, but offering peace—a peace won through the cross and resurrection. Just as Jesus is transformed by this experience, so too the disciples' fear turns to joy. In the giving of his Spirit, Jesus literally breathes life back into the disciples. They are to go out and continue his work of forgiveness, judgment and witness in the world.

- What kind of experiences animate you and 'bring you to life', giving you energy to keep on with the task?
- What gifts can be discerned among members of the group?
- How are these gifts used by each one?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Recall a time when you felt filled with joy.
- Relive your feelings when you first received the Holy Spirit at baptism.
- How do you feel about being 'sent' into the world?
- Recall someone you no longer see but who had a significant influence on shaping who you are, whose memory is alive for you and whose influence remains strong. Share your recollections of these people. Does this phenomenon give insight into the experience of the disciples at Pentecost?
- Try to recognise and affirm the gifts of others this week and use your own gifts to make life a little easier for someone else.
- Use today's gospel acclamation as your prayer this week:

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful
and kindle in us the fire of your love.*

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

Coming to faith is not so much acquiring a new set of beliefs about God as it is discovering God's existence within the realities of our daily lives. The gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit help us to be more attuned to the actions of God in our lives and in our world. At baptism, the Spirit comes upon the newly initiated Christian, and at confirmation, the Spirit of God is renewed and confirmed in the faithful.

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are: wisdom, understanding, counsel (right judgment), fortitude (courage), knowledge, piety (reverence) and fear (awe) of the Lord (CCC §1831).

The church lists twelve fruits of the Spirit: charity (love), joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity (CCC §1832).

- Explore these gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. How do you see them manifest in yourself and others? In what ways do we need to cultivate these gifts and fruits?

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

Red is the colour that is often associated with the Spirit, and red vestments are worn by the priest on Pentecost Sunday. Red symbolises the intense love or 'fire' of the Holy Spirit. Other symbols of the Spirit are tongues of flame, wind and a white dove. All have their origins in Scripture. Each of these conveys something of the mystery of the Spirit of God, which is beyond human understanding.

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- In what ways are the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit apparent in your community? In what ways does your community use and share those gifts and fruits?
- For some, this may be the last time they meet as an RCIA group. You could consider a special Eucharist and a meal together. It may be appropriate to present each person with a gift: a book of prayers or daily reflections, a Bible or some other suitable aide to ongoing formation.
- Use the symbols of the Holy Spirit as a focus for prayer: the colour red, small flames, a representation of a dove. Pray for the world and for the church. Pray that the Spirit will live in each of you present. A suitable song could be 'Gifts of the Spirit' (GA 183). Conclude with the prayer at the laying on of hands from the rite of confirmation (RCIA §228).

NOTES