

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today we Christians celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, the coming of the promised Holy Spirit to the Church. In the Second reading from Acts, Jews had gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost, a festival the Jews more properly call the Feast of Weeks, but it was called Pentecost because it happened 50 days after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, more often called Passover. There's the intersection. Both Jews and Christians celebrate Pentecost, but it's not the same festival. For one, since the Jewish Passover doesn't always coincide with our Holy Week and Easter, we don't celebrate Pentecost at the same time. But second, our festival is not a harvest festival as the Jews celebrate; and the Jews certainly don't celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit.

But at the origin of our Christian feast, the two were connected. Because it was Pentecost, the Jewish Feast of Weeks, people from all over the Roman empire had gathered in Jerusalem. What an opportune time to clothe the disciples with power from on high! What an opportune time to preach the Gospel!

And so, as we heard Luke describe, in a spectacular display — sound from heaven *“like a mighty rushing wind”* that *“filled the entire house”* ... *“divided tongues as of fire appeared”* and came to rest *“on each one of them”* — the Holy Spirit came down and filled the disciples. And they began to speak in other languages; they went forth and preached in these other languages.

The multitude gathered around, and this diverse people heard the disciples preach in their own native language. This was no gibberish, no ecstatic, unintelligible mumbo jumbo that they were hearing. They were hearing about *“the mighty works of God,”* each in his *“own language.”* The people were bewildered; they were amazed; they were astonished; they were perplexed. Some began to sound like Lutherans; they asked, *“What does this mean?”* Others doubled-down on their mockery: *“They're drunk.”*

Peter gave answer to both groups. *“[T]hese people are not drunk, as you suppose,”* he answered the second group. But rather *“This is the fulfillment of God's promise to His people,”* he answered the first group. Indeed, the Lord promised through the prophet Joel: *“I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.”* That is what you are witnessing. *“I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.”* That is what you are hearing.

But there are more such promises, like the Lord God declaring through the prophet Ezekiel: *“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit*

*within you*” (Ezek. 36:25-27). I hardly have to tell you that this cleansing by the sprinkling of clean water happens by Holy Baptism. It is the sanctifying and cleansing that St. Paul says Christ does *“by the washing of water with the word”* (Eph. 5:26). I hardly have to tell you that this new heart we receive from God by replacing old stony hearts with hearts of flesh happens when we repent and are baptized; and this new spirit that God puts in us is the Holy Spirit given by the same *“washing of regeneration and renewal”* (Tit. 3:5). There in his letter to Titus, St. Paul says the Holy Spirit is *“poured out on us richly [in this washing] through Jesus Christ our Savior”* (Tit. 3:6). This is our salvation — not the things *“done by us in righteousness”* (Tit. 3:5), but God’s mercy toward us in Jesus Christ, by His cross, by His resurrection, by His ascension, and by His sending the Holy Spirit to bestow upon us the fruits of His bloody sacrifice.

We heard a bit more of Peter’s Pentecost Day sermon several weeks ago — when Pastor Harrison was here. He didn’t preach on it; let me remind you of it here, for it intersects with today’s texts. For when Peter had finished preaching to the gathered people, after he had called them out for their participation in Jesus’ crucifixion — and they had participated whether they were there on Good Friday in that bloodthirsty mob or not, just as we participate in Jesus’ death by our own sins — when he had let them know just whom they had crucified and who had risen from the dead — *“know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ”* (Acts 2:36) — the people were cut to the heart and asked, *“what shall we do?”* Peter responded: *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 2:38).

The Spirit has come upon us in Holy Baptism. We have been privileged to participate in three baptisms in the last several weeks. By this water, He has sent us to our knees in humble repentance, and He keeps doing it. He lifts us up with the good news of forgiveness of sins, righteousness, life everlasting through faith in Christ Jesus. Repentance, forgiveness, salvation, life. As we sing: *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free spirit”* (LSB 192-3; Ps. 51:10-12).

One does not need to be very theological, one does not have to be very pious, to know that Jesus is where you go for this stuff we call grace, especially forgiveness. *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me,”* Jesus said; *“and let him who believes in me drink, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”*

You know that Marge and I were in North Carolina a little more than a week ago. We went to a wedding for a first cousin. We were the only ones there from the

Japanese side of the family. I've told others this: other than the bride, Keiko was definitely the rock star.

I wore my collar to the wedding; I had just worn a tie to the rehearsal dinner. The clerical collar caught peoples' attention. People whispered: "Who is he? A Catholic priest?" At the reception, one person — his name is Mike — was bold enough to ask. "Are you a Catholic priest? Do you hear confession and forgive sins?"

Now there were lots of sailors at this wedding. The groom had been in the Navy and his groomsmen were sailors and former sailors. And the bride's side has strong connections to the Navy. This Mike was retired Navy ... a retired Navy Seal. Holy smokes!?! This guy wants me to hear his confession ... and around this table with others listening in? I listened for a long time to his story filled with the salty language expected from a sailor. But, fear not! He never actually confessed any sins, and so I'm not breaking the confessional seal.

Mike told me of a tragic story of another Seal — powerful, handsome, charismatic — who — to make a long story short — got caught up with an academy grad who had a former boyfriend (also a Naval officer) who was extremely jealous. That caused the boyfriend to kill the Seal, the girl, and himself.

Our Seal, Mike, an NCO Senior Chief, was supposed to be taking his team out for training when he found out that this officer in their team had been murdered. That was hard. The 96 others on his team through the years, who had gone out but had come back in a casket, was one thing. This was another. He refused to grieve outwardly. He "sailored on" with his team. A Navy Chaplain — not a lowly Lieutenant, but a Captain — came to him to ask him about his team: "How are they doing?" "We're Seals. We've got a job to do, and we'll do it. They don't need to talk to you," he told the Chaplain. And the Chaplain astutely suggested: "Perhaps, Senior Chief, you're the one who needs to talk to me." Mike acknowledged, he did. He was struggling. He was the one who needed comfort in his grief. He was the one who needed assurance.

Friends, this is Memorial Day weekend, a time to remember our fallen warriors. We ask our warriors to do some pretty horrific things. I was in the Air Force, but I was not a warrior. I spent time in the Comm Center and the "Head Shed" scheduling and planning maintenance on communication equipment, radar, and radios. Mike was a warrior who had fought many battles. Who knows how many people he had killed? He needed to be assured that this weight of death that hung around his neck could indeed be forgiven. I was able to give this assurance in Jesus who died but lives, by the Spirit who flows forth from Jesus as a river, who cleanses us and gives us life.

And this assurance is not just for him, but for all for whom Jesus died, for this is also Pentecost, the celebration of the coming of the Spirit, of the Helper who teaches us to know our God aright and call Him Father with delight, who causes us to abide in Christ with a living faith, who imparts strength to our weakness, in Whom we find our comfort true. He is the breath of Life exhaled from Jesus' mouth. He is the cleansing, Living Water flowing forth from Jesus' pierced side to whom we pray: "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord," "Come, holy Light, guide divine," "Come, holy Fire, comfort true," bestow Your gifts — repentance and forgiveness, righteousness and faith, salvation and life — upon all of us who thirst. God grant it ...

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.