

Pentecost

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost, which ranks in equal importance to the solemnities of Christmas and Easter. There is a common thread which runs through these greatest liturgical observances. What is the common thread? The common thread is Holiness or Sanctification. At Christmas, Jesus raises our earthly existence to a new level by becoming one with us. At Easter, he gives us complete access to holiness by breaking us free from sin and death so we can attain the fullness of heaven. At Pentecost, the fire of the Holy Spirit comes into each one of us, body, soul and spirit, so that through the Holy Spirit's sevenfold gifts, our daily lives are transformed and "We become partakers of his Divine Nature." (2Pet 1:4) In short, we are destined for God!

Pentecost, like Christmas and Easter, has its own vigil, with different readings from the next day. At both Easter and Christmas, a special hymn, called a "sequence" or a "following" to the theme of the first and second readings, is sung before the proclamation of the gospel. These "sequences" were originally written as poems to instruct the people about the sacred mysteries of our faith at a time in the middle ages when many people could not read or write.

In today's first reading, and especially the Gospel reading from St. John 20:19-23, two different accounts of Pentecost are proclaimed. In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles is very public and "noisy" (from the sound of a violent wind and everyone from all over the Roman world witnessing this great event in one place.) By contrast in St. John's Gospel, the reception of the Holy Spirit is very private and quiet. Only the Apostles are in the Upper Room alone with Jesus.

This twofold emphasis on the way the Holy Spirit was received by the Apostles is intentional. First, it helps us to understand that the reception of and the gifts of the Holy Spirit come to rest upon EACH ONE of us in order for us to use those gifts for the building up of the church. Second, our personal holiness is also something very intimate, private and personal. It is the very voice of God living in us and speaking to each one of us in the depths of our hearts. To conclude, both the public and private part of our lives are lived in holiness.

In conclusion, "Happy Birthday" to everyone! You are the church! Through the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray that all of us live lives of holiness, marked by a deep hunger and need for God. By doing this, the Church will become stronger as it gives witness to the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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