

Themes of Pentecost

By Father Robert J. Kennedy

The Pentecost Feast Day is rich with many themes. It is a Baptism day, a Spirit day, a Church day. Pentecost brings to a close the celebration of the mystery of Easter, the season of rebirth and renewal. New members have been initiated into the Christian community by Baptism, "old" members have been revitalized by the mystery of Christ's dying and rising. Through the weeks of Easter, the dimensions of our life in Christ have been proclaimed to us: "God our Father (has) given us new birth." We now beg the strength and light of the Holy Spirit (alternative vigil prayer).

In the early centuries of the Church's life, Pentecost was the second day of the whole year on which baptisms were allowed. The growing number of converts in the third and fourth centuries called for an additional time to the Easter

Vigil. Pentecost was the logical choice because of the roots and origin of the feast.

The Jewish feast of Pentecost was originally a celebration of the spring harvest, a sign of the Passover renewal. Thus, it began as a feast of fulfillment, plenitude, completion. Some sects, however, linking it more directly with Passover, slowly made Pentecost a feast of the promulgation of the Ten Commandments, a feast of covenant renewal. Luke, in recounting the events of the Christian Pentecost, was concerned that we see them in the light of Sinai. Christian Pentecost is a day of fulfillment of covenant promise, of sealing a new covenant law in the Spirit, of initiation into this new covenant.

A feast of the law becomes, in Christ, a feast of the Spirit.

And what a Spirit! The liturgy for

"guide" suggests a process, growth, development. As one with a torch can explore the darkness of a cave and penetrate its mysteries more and more deeply, so the Holy Spirit guides us progressively to a fuller understanding of the truth.

This development has been one of the characteristics of the Church. All through Acts we see it at work: the apostles gaining deeper and deeper understanding of the teachings of Christ. The process goes on all through history; there was Paul, then Augustine, then Thomas, then the Council of Trent and now Vatican II. In Vatican II the new insights were so profound that Pope John called the era of Vatican II a new Pentecost.

How does the Holy Spirit guide? After the Reformation, the Spirit guided the Church by decree. For the authority of the Church had been attacked; therefore, Church authority had to assert itself.

Today the situation is different. Vatican II saw the Church not so much as hierarchy — although this is essential to the Church — but primarily as community. That means that the Spirit leads us today, not so much by decree, as by controversy. Someone wrote that community is formed by the successful resolution of conflict created by encounter. That is the why of Parish Councils. They offer the structure needed to create encounter. Encounter generates conflicts. Conflicts, if unresolved, lead to disunity and dissension. If resolved, they lead to discovery, conversion, and more perfect community. Here is where the Spirit operates. By infusing love into Christian hearts, He contributes to the successful resolution of conflicts.

Of course, in any society dissent is dangerous. Rome clearly does not like certain notions floating around in the theological stratosphere, but what is remarkable is her absence of anathemas. Some controversialists treat their adversaries with scorn and mockery. We hear no anathemas from Rome, but we hear them locally.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Love. He leads by the path of controversy, but Christian controversy is the art of disagreeing without becoming disagreeable, of resolving conflicts in love as did the apostles at the first Council of the Church. For where love is, there is God — the Spirit of Love.

this feast knows no bounds in describing her. She is the Spirit of universal unity, dwelling in the hearts of all who believe. A gift from the Father, she has begun the teaching of the Gospel, and enables prayer and praise and the announcement of Jesus as Lord; she is the holy Spirit of Truth.

The vigil and actual feast day readings proclaim the Holy Spirit as the one who overpowers all divisions, is the presence that makes God's People a kingdom of priests, a holy nation; she raises dry bones to vigor, inaugurates a new age, helps us in our weakness, flows through us as a living stream, is the source of all gifts, forgives us our sins. All this because Christ died and rose! All this because he has returned to the Father! The love of God has been poured into our hearts by his Spirit living in us, alleluia! (Entrance antiphon).

But there is more! The Spirit of Jesus is for us, the Church. In fact, she makes us Church, a holy nation. The Spirit binds us together as one.

Pentecost, then, is also a church day; it is the Church's birthday. But we are not a Church for our own satisfaction — we are a missionary Church. We are baptized and strengthened by the gift of the Spirit in order to continue the work of Christ, in order to bring the good news of Christ more fully into the

INSIGHTS On Pastoral Liturgy

world. And the Spirit of Christ, continuing "to work in the world through the hearts of all who believe" (Opening Prayer), transcends all divisions and unges all races, nations and tongues into a voice of praise, a single faith.

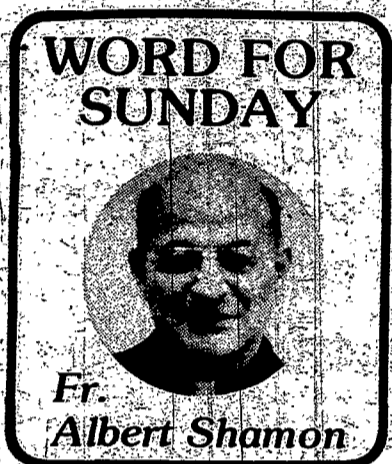
Recognizing such power within us, it is no wonder that the liturgy for Pentecost also carries a heavy strain of intercession: "Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth." The magnificent sequence prayer pleads for relief and consolation, rest from weariness, comfort in distress, healing, strength, and light.

Break our stubbornness, warm our hearts, guide our steps! We are in need, yet our prayer is confident for our trust is in the Lord.

"Spirit of Life,
Spirit of Love,
Soul of the Living,
Heart of the Loving,
Make us into soul-brothers,
Newborn again!"

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WORD FOR SUNDAY

Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Jn. 20:19-23, (R1) Acts 2:1-11, (R2) 1 Cor. 12:3-7, 12-13.

St. Luke (R1) locates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Jewish feast of Pentecost. St. John (R3) locates it on Easter day.

Luke's account probably telescopes events that took place over a period of time on a less dramatic scale. He is at pains to show that Christianity cannot be considered a mere religious sect within Judaism, which developed its own brand of Messianism. On the contrary, he shows that from the beginning it originated in the inspiration and under the compulsion of God, the Holy Spirit.

The wind presaged a new action of God in the history of salvation.

The fire symbolized the presence of God, as on Sinai; and tongues, as of fire prefigured a new covenant initiated by preaching the gospel to all nations and by giving the Spirit of Love who would undo the fractionalism caused at Babel.

In St. John's account (R3) Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on the apostles. In the beginning God had created man with a breath. Here the Spirit is seen as making a new people of the apostles, and the apostles making the Church a new people through the power to forgive sins (making life new again).

We've all had the experience. I'm sure, of grappling with some problem or subject only to have, at long last, the light of understanding break in. And we exclaimed, "Oh, now I see." That was what happened on the first Pentecost. The followers of Christ had believed in Him, but on Pentecost they understood Him. The pieces of the jigsaw puzzle fell into place. They knew now His identity — that Jesus is God! They understood His death, His resurrection, His commission to them. It all fell into place. Jesus had foretold this: "When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you to all truth" (Jn. 16:13).

However, illumination, understanding is but one of the functions of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Another is guidance. Christ has promised that the Spirit would guide us to all truth according to our capacity. This is the

Hospital Staff Plans Dinner

St. Mary's Hospital medical and dental staff with the women's auxiliary are planning a Spring Dinner Dance on Thursday, June 3 at Oak Hill Country Club. Entertainment will be provided by the Beale Street Bandwagon.

Latin Mass Set June 13

An all Latin High Mass will be celebrated at St. Michael's Church, Rochester, on Sunday morning, June 13 at 10:30. The celebrant will be Father Anthony Valente and the choir will be under the direction of Dr. Wendell Howard. The choir will sing the Mass in honor of St. Anthony by Noel Goemanne.

ARCHCONFRATERNITY TO FETE FR. FLICK

The women of the Archconfraternity of the Holy Family of St. Joseph's/Our Lady of Victory will honor their spiritual director, Father John Flick, CSSR, at a breakfast Sunday, June 6. Father Flick is celebrating his golden anniversary as a Redemptorist. The breakfast at the Holiday Inn will follow the 9 a.m. Mass, which the women will attend as a group.

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