

Cindy Cottone

The Bible Corner



A Gift for Sara

"Alex, will you bring me back something from Jerusalem?" said Sara in her most convincing voice. She started jumping up and down then, as if to emphasize the point. "Please, Alex, please. Say yes!"

"Sara, my misguided sister," he began, trying to hide a smile. "I hope that when you grow up you find a very rich man to marry you. Pentecost is a time of thanksgiving. We make a gift back to the Lord of the first fruits of the harvest."

"I know, Alex," Sara answered. "It's just that I wish I could go to Jerusalem, too. Will you take me there some day? I've never been to a big city."

"Only if you promise to stop asking for gifts!" he replied.

"Tell me about Jerusalem again, Alex," Sara pleaded.

"The city is ruled by Roman soldiers," Alex began. "The Jews must always be careful to keep their laws. For the holiday, many Jews from different countries will gather at the temple, each speaking a unique language. Yet we are all alike in that we come to Jerusalem for Pentecost to worship together the same God."

Sara helped Alex place the two loaves of bread in his satchel. This bread was to be his offering. His mother had baked it from the first wheat that had been harvested this year.

It was just the three of them after Alex's father had died. But this family had many blessings to thank God for at Pentecost. Alex had managed to support his mother and sister by farming the small plot of land they owned on the west bank of the Nile River in Egypt. The soil was

very fertile there and yielded a rich crop.

Alex placed several coins in a small leather pouch and secured it on his belt. It would be enough to purchase a couple of pigeons for the burnt offering he would make to the Lord in thanksgiving. And maybe there would still be something left to buy a gift for Sara, too.

The journey to Jerusalem took two days. When the city finally came into view, Alex quickened his pace. He looked forward every year to coming here for the Pentecost celebration. There were certain to be merchants with all kinds of things for sale, in the marketplace by the temple. He'd have to be cautious in his dealings with them. These merchants would be eager to turn a quick profit from the large numbers of unsuspecting pilgrims that would flock to Jerusalem for the holiday. There would be Jews from Mesopotamia, Judea, Crete and Rome, all with their own distinctive customs and languages.

"I wonder how God is able to listen to so many different voices speaking to Him all at once," Alex thought, smiling. Alex's belief in God was strong, even though he lived among so many foreigners in Egypt who worshipped so many different false gods.

The streets in Jerusalem were swarming with people as Alex made his way toward the marketplace. He felt for his leather pouch. With a bit of luck, he could find some small trinket for Sara as he did every year. One of the merchants had beautiful dolls for sale. Alex picked up one of the dolls and examined it. It was just the sort of gift that Sara would love to receive. But he was certain that the price was more than he could afford.

As Alex continued around to the other

merchants' stalls, the winds started to pick up. He closed his eyes slightly because they smarted from the dust the winds had whipped up from the market square. A storm was certain to be on the way. The winds continued to blow even stronger, and the merchants rushed to pack up their wares for another day.

Suddenly, Alex heard a great roaring in the sky, and he was frightened. He stopped a man and asked what the noise might be, but the man motioned that he didn't understand him. Everyone starting running toward where the noise seemed to be coming from, and Alex followed the others.

People were pointing at a house in disbelief. It looked as though flames or tongues of fire had appeared over the heads of the men there. These men started preaching to the crowd about the miracles of God. Alex was surprised to hear them speaking in his own language, and astonished that the other people could understand in their own languages, as well.

Everyone stood there amazed until someone from the crowd laughed and shouted, "These men are from Galilee. They are drunk, ignore them! They are just trying to play tricks on us."

Alex watched as one of the men from the house came forward to speak. He told the people that his name was Peter, and that they shouldn't be afraid, since he was going to explain the strange things that had happened.

"Listen, visitors and residents of Jerusalem alike," Peter began. "We are not drunk at this early hour of the day, as you seem to think. God promised long ago that He would pour out the Holy Spirit upon all mankind. What you have just seen was foretold by the prophet Joel." The crowd stopped talking and listened intently as Peter continued.

"God also promised to send a Messiah to save His people, and He did this, too," Peter went on. "He sent Jesus of Nazareth to us. But as part of God's plan, Jesus was crucified on a cross and died for

our sins. After three days, Jesus rose from the dead. And before He ascended to His Father in heaven, He promised us something. Jesus said, 'I will ask My Father to give you another comforter, the Holy Spirit. He will never leave you and will give you the power and courage to be My witnesses to the Truth for all people.' Today Jesus has fulfilled this promise by sending the Holy Spirit upon us."

Alex looked around at the others in the crowd. Like him, they were moved deeply by the things that Peter had told them. One of them asked, "What then should we do?"

Peter replied, "You must be baptized and turn from your sins. Believe in Jesus, and that He died and has forgiven you. Then you too will be given the gift of the Holy Spirit, and you will be able to become His witnesses."

On that day, some 3,000 people were baptized by Peter and the other apostles. They became members of the new Church. Alex believed in Jesus and came forward to be baptized, too. He knew that he would never forget that Pentecost in Jerusalem.

When he returned home to Egypt, he brought Sara and his mother a very special gift, better than any gift they had ever received.

For discussion:

- 1) What was the original meaning of the feast of Pentecost? What was the new meaning?
- 2) What kinds of things did the Holy Spirit help the new Church members to do? What can the Holy Spirit help us to do?
- 3) What is the name of the sacrament in which we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit?

For further reading:

- 1) The story of Pentecost is found in the New Testament in Acts, Chapter 2.
- 2) Jesus promised his apostles that He would send the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John, Chapter 14: 15-17.

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