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Pentecost • Acts 2:1–21 • May 24, 2015

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The Feast Day of Pentecost is the fiftieth day of the Easter season, the eighth day beyond the seven weeks of seven days. It is the culmination of the joyous, uninterrupted feast of the resurrection of Christ Jesus. It is the end of the beginning (the celebration of the risen Christ among his people) and the beginning of the end (the church's ongoing life in the Spirit with hope toward the coming Day of the Lord). On this day God poured out the Spirit of the resurrection upon the disciples and the church (Acts 2:1–21) as the apostles gathered in Jerusalem on the Feast of Weeks (the first fruits of the wheat harvest) and celebrated the giving of the law. Only the harvest is now the first fruits of the “new heaven and new earth, where righteousness dwells” (2 Pt 3:13). Until the Day of the Lord comes in which the new heaven and earth will be established, the church lives by hope in those “things that are to come” (Jn 16:13), the reign and rule of the Lord God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As Jesus told the apostles, “If I do not go away, the helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (Jn 16:7). The Spirit of the Lord will declare the truth, taking what belongs to Jesus and declaring it to the church. Among what belongs to Jesus is his resurrected life and his victory over sin, sinners, death, Satan, and hell, all celebrated in the Easter feast. Until the Day of the resurrected Lord, the church is not left alone. The Lord pours out the Easter gift: the resurrection Spirit fills the lives of the apostles. Here is the beginning of the end. The flames of the living Spirit upon the apostles signal the fulfillment of the Prophet Joel's word: “In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (Acts 2:17). In the anointing of the Spirit there is the life of the resurrected Jesus. God put his Spirit within his apostolic church on the day of Pentecost, and the church lives (Ez 37:14), “an exceedingly great army” (Ez 37:10).

Peter's Pentecost sermon announces the fulfillment of God's promise. The apostles proclaimed in the tongues/languages of the world the mighty saving deeds of God culminating in the resurrection of the Son of God. The Spirit is active in Peter's words convicting the hearers concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. As a result the Israelites from all nations cry out for mercy and life and repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. It is the Pentecost of the Jewish church, the new Israel, and the first fruits of the church. Yet, even Peter's words hint that the mighty deeds of God are even mightier: “For the promise is for . . . everyone who is far off, everyone whom the Lord God calls to himself.” Even Peter was shocked to realize that the promise extended to those outside Israel. So, God commands him to show no partiality and to preach Jesus Christ the Lord to Cornelius and the Gentiles in Caesarea. And while Peter is preaching “the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word” (Acts 10:44). It is Pentecost again, the Pentecost of the Gentiles. So, by the anointing of the Spirit, the Gentiles are grafted into the original stock of Jewish believers. The gift of the resurrection comes to fruition in the Gentile Pentecost as peoples of all the nations die and rise in the baptismal bath of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost Day should celebrate the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon Jewish and Gentile believers. It should be a baptismal celebration day. Those not baptized at

the Easter vigil should be baptized today. And in the divine service consider replacing the public confession and absolution with a rite of baptismal remembrance and renewal, perhaps including anointing of the forehead and hands in remembrance of baptismal identity and the life of Christian service. Read the word in the languages of the world, especially those spoken in your corner of the global community. Burn candles on special candelabras and candle stands throughout the nave. And focus on the paschal candle on this Easter finale. End the service with the procession of the candle out the doors of the church into the world that God seeks to reclaim for himself. So, bear witness “that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43).

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