

PENTECOST

THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

WHAT IS PENTECOST?

Pentecost is the Solemnity on which we commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the early followers of Jesus.

Before the events of the first Pentecost, which came fifty days after Jesus' death and resurrection, there were followers of Jesus, but no formal movement that could be meaningfully called "the church." Thus, from an historical point of view, Pentecost can be viewed as the day on which the church began.

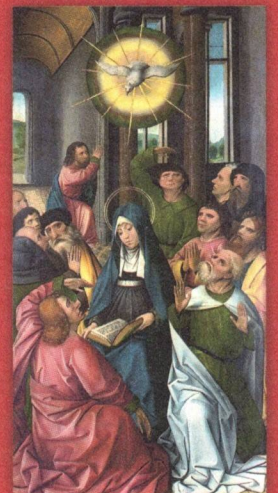
However, Pentecost, coming from the Greek word "fifty" or "fiftieth day," was not invented by the early Christians. Instead, they borrowed it from Greek-speaking Jews who used the phrase to refer to a holiday known as the Festival of Weeks (*Shavuot*). Originally a harvest festival (Exod 23:16), Pentecost, in time, turned into a day to commemorate the giving of the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. This day later became especially significant for Christians because, seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus, during the celebration of *Shavuot*, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon his first followers, thus empowering them for their mission and gathering them together as a church.

THE FIRST PENTECOST

That first Pentecost occurred as a group of Christ's disciples had gathered in Jerusalem during the *Shavuot* recorded in Acts, Chapter 2:

"When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim."

The Spirit energized the disciples and empowered them to continue Jesus' mission to proclaim the good news of salvation and gather everyone into Jesus' kingdom community. They demonstrated this power by speaking in languages understood by the visitors to Jerusalem from across the ancient lands.



Come Holy Spirit

Veni Sancte Spiritus, (“Come Holy Spirit”) sometimes called the “Golden Sequence,” is the sequence for the Mass for Pentecost. The hymn has been attributed to three different authors, King Robert II the Pious of France (970-1031), Pope Innocent III (1161-1216), and Stephen Langton (d 1228), Archbishop of Canterbury although it has been attributed to others as well. Originally composed in Latin, the following is the one typically heard at Mass.

Come, Holy Spirit, come!
And from your celestial home
Shed a ray of light divine!

Come, Father of the poor!
Come, source of all our store!
Come, within our bosoms shine.

You, of comforters the best;
You, the soul's most welcome guest;
Sweet refreshment here below;

In our labor, rest most sweet;
Grateful coolness in the heat;
Solace in the midst of woe.

O most blessed Light divine,
Shine within these hearts of yours,
And our inmost being fill!

Where you are not, we have naught,
Nothing good in deed or thought,
Nothing free from taint of ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew;
On our dryness pour your dew;
Wash the stains of guilt away:

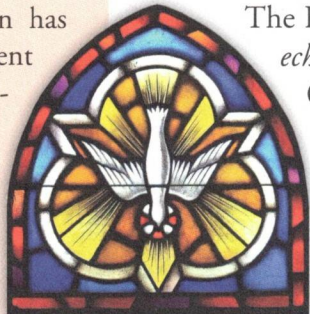
Bend the stubborn heart and will;
Melt the frozen, warm the chill;
Guide the steps that go astray.

On the faithful, who adore
And confess you, evermore
In your sevenfold gift descend;

Give them virtue's sure reward;
Give them your salvation, Lord;
Give them joys that never end. Amen.
Alleluia.

GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Church on the first Pentecost just as it was for each of us in baptism. The Spirit continues to empower us not only to *believe*, but to *act* as disciples.



The Holy Spirit provides gifts. These gifts, according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, make us part of the Body of Christ and then enable us to strengthen that Body and the whole world by the way we live.

Wisdom is the gift of knowledge about divine matters, particularly about the will of God.

Understanding helps us to see beyond the surface to find meaning in the mystery of our human life. In particular, this gift helps us to see how our faith unites us to God and to one another.

Counsel directs our attention to God as the source of genuine values and helps us apply judgment to particular actions. Counsel also helps us assist others in finding which course to take.

Courage helps us to do what we know is right—even when we are afraid.

Knowledge is the insight into what we ought to believe and what is not worthy of belief.

Reverence leads us to respect and give honor to God and to others. Reverence helps us subject ourselves to God and ask for what we need.

Fear of the Lord gives us a healthy awe in the face of the mystery of Almighty God. Rather than making us afraid of God, fear of the Lord helps us to abandon ourselves to the Love that is God.

SYMBOLS OF THE SEASON

Baptism and confirmation were once celebrated as a part of Pentecost Sunday for those who did not receive the sacraments on Easter. John the Baptist baptized with water in the River Jordan and spoke of a baptism with the Holy Spirit that Jesus would bring. When Jesus was baptized with water by John, the Spirit descended upon him like a dove (Luke 3:15-22).

Tongues of fire appeared to hover over the disciples on Pentecost—a sign of the Lord's presence and power. In the Old Testament, fire was often a sign of God's presence and holiness, which might purify or punish.

Red, the liturgical color for Pentecost Day, reminds us of the offering of life—lives of Christian martyrs gone before us and of our own lives poured out in the service of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is represented in Scripture in various ways—as a peaceful dove, as life-giving breath or invisible wind, or as visible fire that transforms what it touches. Throughout Scripture, the Spirit is the Lord's gift to his people to give life, faith and understanding.