

Pentecost Sunday

June 8, 2025

In the first Temple in Jerusalem, there was a fire on the altar where the sacrifices were offered. It was a fire that God commanded should be kept burning at all times. One of the major responsibilities of the Temple priests was to add wood to the fire continuously to make sure it would never go out. That fire was to be used whenever an animal sacrifice was to be offered.

What made this fire so special? It was a fire that came down from heaven. It was a fire that was not lit by human beings but by God Himself. In the Book of Leviticus (9:24), Moses builds an altar in the desert. When he puts the offering on it, fire comes down to consume it, symbolizing that God Himself accepted the sacrifice. From that day onward, the fire that came down from heaven kept burning. It stayed with the people of Israel during their journey in the desert, during the time they conquered the Holy Land, all the way up to the time that King Solomon built the first Temple.

For more than 400 years, the priests of Israel kept that fire burning as God had commanded them to do. However, when the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple, the fire was extinguished. During the entire history of the people of Israel, God never sent down fire from Heaven. Even when the people returned to Jerusalem and built a new Temple, that perpetual fire did not return. It seemed to be gone forever.

That brings us to the feast we are celebrating today - Pentecost. What happened? The Holy Spirit rushes down like a mighty wind and touches down on the apostles in tongues of fire. Just as God did with Moses in the desert, He sent fire down from Heaven. This was the beginning of the New Temple - the Church. The fire that burns in that new Temple does not have a human origin. It comes from God. And it is not up to us to keep it burning. God Himself takes care of that by sending the fire of His Holy Spirit into every person who is baptized and confirmed. The fire that comes down from Heaven is no longer in a physical place that can be destroyed. Instead it burns in all of us who have professed that "Jesus Christ is Lord".

That is why fire is one of the images of the Holy Spirit. It is the reason that we wear red today. This fire of the Holy Spirit, which God Himself lights within us, has three effects on us. Like fire, the Holy Spirit transforms us, purifies us and sets us aflame with love of

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God.

The first effect of the Holy Spirit's fire is that it transforms us. When something is touched by fire, it's changed forever. Once something's burned, it can never go back to the way it was before. It's the same with us. When we're baptized and confirmed, the Holy Spirit marks us, and we're changed for good. Another way to put it is that we are "sealed" by the Holy Spirit. Even if we try to turn away from faith or ignore God's grace, that mark on our soul does not disappear. It's still there.

It's like writing your name on the cover of a book. You are saying, "This belongs to me." That's what God has done with us. He's marked us as his own. And the spiritual world knows it—angels and demons alike. Because of that, we can go to God with confidence. He knows who we are, and He listens.

And when we realize there's something in us that needs to change? All we have to do is ask the Holy Spirit to step in and renew us. His fire will do the rest.

Second, the Holy Spirit purifies us. Just as we boil water to get rid of germs, the Spirit's fire burns away everything in us that doesn't belong to God. As God's Spirit fills us up, all that is harmful to us—our sin, our selfishness—starts to melt away. He changes our hearts so that we actually start loving what God loves and hating what hurts our relationship with Him.

This kind of change isn't always easy. The same fire that purifies us can also burn. We get attached to our bad habits, and it can be tough to let go of them. Still, when we finally let the Holy Spirit do His work and burn away what's weighing us down, we start to feel something incredible: real peace, real joy, and real love. And once we've tasted that kind of freedom, we don't want to go back to being stuck in the same old sinful patterns.

Third, the Holy Spirit lights us up with love for God. When we fall in love, we sometimes say we're "on fire" for that person. Or when we really want something, we talk about having a "burning desire" for it. That's the kind of passion the Holy Spirit stirs up in us for God. It's intense; it takes over everything. That's the same love that gave the apostles the courage to stop hiding and start boldly telling the world about Jesus. It's the love that still moves people today to step away from comfort and serve those in need. And it's the love that led Jesus to give up his life so we could be saved.

So if we're feeling empty inside, drained, and when life seems monotonous, we can

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put ourselves in the Holy Spirit's hands and let Him take the lead. He is the One who can make our hearts overflow with God's love, so much so that we won't be able to keep quiet about it. We'll want to shout his goodness from the rooftops and live every moment in praise. That is the power of His fire burning within us.

In the Gospel of Saint Luke, Jesus says, "I have come to light a fire on the earth..." (Lk 12:49). On Pentecost, His words came true. A fire was lit that was not human in origin, but that came down from heaven, just as it had for Moses. That fire burns within us, transforming us, purifying us, and sending us out to spread that fire so that the whole world is consumed by it. Fire spreads quickly, and so does the Holy Spirit when He finds hearts that are ready to welcome Him and share Him with others.