

SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST

Year B: Acts 2:1-11; Ps 104; 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13; Jn 15:26-27; 16:12-15

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Each year, this great Feast of Pentecost brings to an end the Church's 7-week celebration of the Easter season. For 7 weeks, we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ, His victory over sin and death, and the infinite mercy that He won for us on the Cross. And this festive season ends with today's Feast of Pentecost, when we celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit and the birthday of the Church. Each year, Pentecost is a great time for all of us to consider and appreciate the role that the Holy Spirit plays in the life of the Church and in our own lives.

We know that Pentecost changed everything for the early Church. Before the Holy Spirit descended upon them, the Apostles were hiding in fear, afraid to speak of Christ, or even to be known as one of His followers, for fear of arrest and persecution. But after they met the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they were changed men. They were suddenly and immediately given courage to preach the Gospel truth, and they were fearless of the consequences. On the very day of Pentecost, St. Peter preached boldly to the crowds in Jerusalem, and as a result, about 3,000 persons converted that day and asked to be baptized (cf. Acts 2:14-41). Pentecost was a game-changer for the early Church, and a good relationship with the Holy Spirit can be a game-changer for our souls.

Some of us might admit that we don't often pray to the Holy Spirit. Many of us feel more comfortable praying to Christ, perhaps because He seems more familiar to us, whereas the Holy Spirit seems more mysterious. Many Catholics feel that they know Christ better and speak to Him more easily in their prayers. This is most likely because Christ was visible and was made more clearly known to the world by the Incarnation, whereas the Holy Spirit is invisible and is like the wind which "*blows where it wills, ... you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes*" (Jn 3:8). But the Holy Spirit can be a game-changer in our lives, because it's the Spirit who reminds us of what Christ taught (cf. Jn 14:26), it's the Spirit who leads us to all truth (Jn 16:13), and it's the Spirit who gives us the gifts that help us to be ever more faithful to Christ.

There are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, and one of them is courage, which was very visible on the day of Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles at Pentecost, they were encouraged to begin preaching about Christ,

and they no longer hid in fear in the upper room. And as a result the world was changed by the spreading of the Gospel. We all need this gift of courage. Courage is the virtue that helps us to overcome fear in order to do what is right. Courage “imparts to the will an impulse and [an] energy which move it ... to face dangers ... and to endure without complaint the slow martyrdom of lifelong tribulation” (*Novena to the Holy Spirit*, Day 4). Courage is what helps us carry our crosses in life and overcome all the obstacles to our salvation. It is the gift of courage that sustains our efforts to be holy, especially when we are faced with temptations or discouragement from repeated habits of sin. Courage helps us keep going when we get tired from the burdens of life.

Another gift of the Holy Spirit is piety. Unfortunately, piety is often dismissed these days as unnecessary, or even worse, it’s thought of as an excess of religion. Pious people are thought to be too religious. But we all need to be pious. Piety is the virtue that makes us love and respect holy things – whatever has been consecrated to God, whether it’s a sacred image or the Blessed Mother herself. And piety is what helps us enjoy the practice of religion as something delightful, rather than a burdensome duty (cf. *Novena to the Holy Spirit*, Day 3). It helps us find the service of God to be sweet and amiable, rather than dull and boring. Some people who are religious hesitate to be pious. They might keep all the Commandments and fulfill their religious obligations, but only because they think they *have* to, not because they really *want* to. Piety is a great goal for all of us – to find the practice of our faith to be sweet and pleasant, rather than taxing and arduous.

Just as the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a game-changer in the life of the early Church, so too, the coming of the Holy Spirit can be a game-changer in our spiritual lives – because when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, He brings His gifts, such as courage and piety, which help us become more religious and more faithful to Christ. The gifts of the Holy Spirit make us more virtuous, they make us more sincere and more generous, and they give us joy and consolation in the practice of our faith. If practicing the Catholic faith ever becomes boring or dry, pray to the Holy Spirit, and ask Him to come into your soul with His gifts. Make Him a most welcome guest in your soul. And then get ready, because the Holy Spirit likes to inject energy and impulse and fervor, like He did for the Apostles on Pentecost. He can give a whole new intensity and passion to our practice of the faith, so that we can be ever better Christians, which is what the world always needs.