

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD**  
**in**  
**THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY**  
**PENTECOST SUNDAY**  
**MAY 23, 2021**

**SCRIPTURES:**

Acts 2:1-11	The community is filled with the Holy Spirit.
1 Corinthians 12:3-13	The Spirit creates a new body for Christ.
John 20:19-23	Jesus comes to those who fear, bringing peace.
Psalms 104: 1,24,29-31,3	God's Spirit has all power.

**READ THE SCRIPTURES:**

*Read the Scriptures carefully in your group, beginning with the Gospel. Take a few minutes in silence to hear the Lord speaking to the heart. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the Church community. What does God want the community to hear today?*

**SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:**

**John:**

In the Gospel of John, there is no separate Pentecost event; it is always tied in with the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. He breathes on them and gives them his Spirit. Again, Jesus identifies himself as the Crucified One. If they can identify with him in his suffering, then they will receive power for the works of the resurrection. The Church, which is the body of Christ, is sent to do the works of the living Christ. The Church can have no other mission than to heal and to forgive, to reconcile those who have been alienated. This empowerment for forgiveness cannot be interpreted narrowly. The power to reconcile has to be the very power of God. No human or human agency can do this, only God and the One whom God has empowered: Jesus Christ the Lord. The power to forgive implies the power to overcome all the effects of sin in the world.

Some have wanted to see the sacrament of baptism rather than the sacrament of penance as the mission enjoined on the Church by the Risen Lord. Up to the time of the Council of Trent (16th century), this passage was used by the Church to point to its responsibility to bring the nations to salvation through baptism. The failure to offer baptism would in fact deprive people of the opportunity to be saved. Since the Council of Trent quoted this passage in its solemn teaching on the sacrament of penance, many have extended its meaning to include the ministry of that sacrament, too. In any event, we should not think only about penance when we hear this section of John.

The mission of the Church belongs to the whole body of Christ, not just that of the clergy. The whole Church grants or withholds salvation in the name of Christ. The Spirit has been given to the whole community. Some ministries may be exercised by the ordained within the community, but the whole community becomes responsible for those ministries.

Fear kept the disciples from their responsibilities until the locked doors no longer held them in, no more than those locked doors kept Jesus out. There is a new freedom that comes from Jesus' resurrection and a new horizon given to his followers when he breathes the Spirit upon them.

The Gospel needs to be proclaimed anew in every age and to new people everywhere. The

Church community must hear it again and again itself. In it, there is a message of victory which gives hope to those who still live in fear. Barriers have been broken down; mercy and love have been poured out into the world. The Spirit of God, which hovered over the waters at creation and brought all things into being, abides in the lives of the disciples: all is possible.

### **Acts:**

Pentecost is a Greek word meaning “fifty days.” It refers to the Feast of Weeks which is celebrated by Jews 50 days after Passover. It is a feast of thanksgiving for the spring harvest of wheat. During the Feast of Weeks, the Jews remember and renew their commitment to the covenant: they belong to God and God belongs to them. Faithfulness is called for. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the community of believers reverses the confusion of Babel. Whereas sin has led to a multiplication of unknown tongues, now God brings human beings back together so they can hear the many tongues as one, in holiness and grace. Wind and fire are always signs of God’s work, especially associated with the covenant.

### **1 Corinthians:**

The Church at Corinth was as divided as the Church is today. Debates raged as to the priority of certain gifts from God in the life of the believer. Paul points out that the gifts are complementary and meant for the common good. The gift does not give stature to the one who has received it. Rather, it gives a responsibility to share the gift with others. It is designed for the good of the Church. The variety of gifts points only to the generosity of God. God wants all those gifts unified for the proper functioning of the body of believers. Baptism and Eucharist create the unity that will bind all the gifts into one body for the glory of God.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. How is it that forgiveness of sins, one for each other, becomes a sign of the kingdom of God? How effective is that sign today? What would be the impact upon the world if all could see us forgiving one another constantly? Describe how that would really bring about the kingdom.

2. “Receive the Holy Spirit!” is a command from Jesus. How have we responded to that command in our personal lives? What difference does it make to read that sentence as a *command* rather than as an *offer* from Jesus? How has the Church community responded?

3. Even after Peter had denied knowing Jesus just a few days earlier, Jesus comes now with words of “peace” and “forgiveness” for him and for all. How do we feel when Jesus forgives us after we have sinned? Do we, all too often, expect punishment rather than forgiveness from Jesus? In what way does our expectation limit us as to what we will receive from the Lord?

## **SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION**

Suggest ways in which the Church today might exercise the ministry of forgiveness more effectively. Work out some practical exercises for doing works of forgiveness during the week to come.

## PRAYING TOGETHER:

Prayer from the words of the poet John Milton (1608-1674):

*O Holy Spirit of God, who prefers the holy and pure heart to any temple, teach us all truth; what in us is dark, illumine; what is low, raise and support; what is shallow, deepen; that every chapter of our lives may witness to your power and justify the ways of God to all people. In the name of Jesus, the giver of all grace. Amen.*

## CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the Church becomes the living body of Christ and is empowered to do the works of Christ in the world. The whole Church, the gathering of all its members, great and small, clergy and laity, is sent by God to continue the saving work of Jesus Christ.

The Catholic Church differs from other Christian churches in this matter. Our doctrine on the Church firmly adheres to the teaching that the Church itself, as body of Christ in the world, is empowered by Christ to continue Christ's work through time. The Church not only proclaims the kingdom of God but also makes it happen.

The Holy Spirit came upon Mary at Nazareth, and she conceived the Son of God in her womb. The Holy Spirit comes upon the assembly of the disciples in the upper room, and they become the body of Christ in that time and place. Through the ages, the Spirit is bestowed on every new generation so that the body of Christ might be present and at work in that generation. The mission of the Church is therefore identical to the mission of Christ: to proclaim the Good News of God's kingdom, to call people to repentance and to faith, to offer praise and thanksgiving to the heavenly Father, to guide all people in the ways of the Gospel. The power of the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the Church community, makes it possible for the Church to fulfill its mission.

The Church must ever pray for faithfulness to its mission. Opening its heart to the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church itself is purified of its unfaithfulness and strengthened in grace for the works of the kingdom. Every parish, every family in the parish, every grouping of the faithful, will only become effective ministers of the Christian vocation when they are continually being made holy by the power of God in the Holy Spirit.

“Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and there shall be a new creation. And you shall renew the face of the earth.”

The Catechism: #737,778

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