

PENTECOST SUNDAY

St. John 20:19-23

Today the Church celebrates the fiftieth day of the Resurrection, when, huddled together, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Apostles, anxious about their lives without the Lord, received the Holy Spirit as He descended upon them by a mighty wind and tongues of fire, giving power to their mission and so giving birth to the Church.

The name Pentecost is a Greek word meaning “fifty days.” Its history lies in the Jewish celebration of Pentecost or *Shavuot*, which the Jews celebrate in honour of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai, fifty days after they began their exodus from slavery in Egypt.

For us, too, Pentecost is a memorial of our freedom from slavery, won for us by the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ, whose power is now shared with us by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to be as Christ to all the world because of our Baptism and Confirmation.

There are many ways people around the world celebrate Pentecost. In Britain it is sometimes called Whitsunday, and it was said that the legendary King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table would feast together every Pentecost. In France they blow trumpets to recall the sound of the mighty wind that filled the room as the Holy Spirit descended. In Italy they scatter rose petals from the ceiling of the church to symbolise the tongues of fire that rested on the heads of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Apostles.

We often speak of and hear about the Holy Spirit but without really knowing who He is. It is easier to imagine the Father, whom is often pictured as a grandfatherly man, and the Son, because He is Jesus, but the Holy Spirit is difficult to imagine. We have the image of the dove descending from Heaven at the Lord’s baptism, and we have the tongues of fire on the heads of the Blessed

Virgin and the Apostles, but we have no image of the Holy Spirit as a person. In fact, the Holy Spirit is a person, He is God, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, but that, too, can be difficult to understand.

So what or who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is the great and unbounded love between God the Father and God the Son, a love so powerful that it is a third person. That is the Holy Spirit.

Some speak of the three ages of God: the age of the Father in the Old Testament, the age of the Son in the New Testament, and the age of the Holy Spirit in the time of the Church. In part this is true as God revealed Himself over time and fully in Christ. But the Holy Spirit, being God, has been in the world throughout its history. It was the Holy Spirit that inspired our fathers, like Abraham and Moses, and taught the Prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah. It was by the power of the Holy Spirit that the Blessed Virgin Mary conceived of her son, our Lord. It was the Holy Spirit who anointed Christ at His baptism, that drove Him out into the wilderness to prepare for His mission, and empowered Him to preach the Kingdom of God. It is the Holy Spirit whom Christ spoke of when He said, "I shall send the paraclete" or an "advocate." If nothing else, then remember this, it is the Holy Spirit that makes Christ present to us, through all ages and in all places. Christ, whom has ascended to Heaven, who is no longer with us on earth bodily, is with us, however, because of the Holy Spirit. It is why we can celebrate the Mass and receive the Eucharist, the real presence of the body and blood, soul and divinity, of Christ.

And since it is our mission, because we are Baptised and Confirmed, to continue to preach the Kingdom of God, it is the Holy Spirit that empowers us, gives us the gifts, the capacity, the ability, the courage, and the perseverance to go on, in spite of suffering and pain and disillusionment and injustice, in faith, believing what we cannot see, in hope, believing that what is promised will come to be, and in love, believing that we are made in the image and likeness of God.