

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Last week we heard in the Epistle, that St. Paul was hoping to arrive in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. This was not the feast that we are celebrating today. It was the Jewish feast of Pentecost which is celebrated 50 days after the Passover.

The Jewish Feast of Passover was the celebration of the Exodus of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. The Jewish Feast of Pentecost was the celebration of God's gift of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai.

In the new covenant, the Passover takes on a new meaning. It is the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection. We call this feast in Greek, Pascha. By Christ's death and resurrection, we are freed from the slavery of sin. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost upon the disciples of Christ brings us a new law.

After rising from the dead and appearing to his disciples, Jesus said as he was taken up into heaven, "Behold, I send the promise of my Father on you. But wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:49).

And "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

We heard in this morning's epistle, that when the day of Pentecost had come (that is the 50th day after the resurrection), all the disciples were gathered together with one accord in the upper room. They were devoting themselves to prayer and hymns to God.

"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:1 – 11). This is the sound which the prophetess Hannah had foretold when she received the promise concerning Samuel: "the Lord went up to heaven and thundered; and he shall give strength and exalt the horn of his anointed" (cf. 1 Sam. 2:10).

This was the Holy Spirit that Christ had promised to his disciples. It came on the day of Pentecost (Jn. 14:26, 15:26; Lk 24:49; Acts 1:5).

The disciples received "the power from on high," and they began to preach and bear witness to Jesus as the risen Christ, the King and the Lord. This moment has traditionally been called the birthday of the Church.

The Holy Spirit had been promised by God throughout the Old Testament. The prophet Ezekiel prophesied, concerning both baptism and the Holy Spirit:

"I shall sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be cleansed from all your uncleanness, and I will also cleanse you from all your idols. I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I shall take the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I shall put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My requirements, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

The prophet Joel prophesied: "After this it shall come to pass that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. And in those days, I shall pour out My Spirit on My servants and on My handmaids."

Jesus had taught many times concerning the Holy Spirit. The Apostle John writes that Jesus had said to the Samaritan women:

"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again! But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. Not only this, the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

St. John also wrote that Jesus had said:

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! From within whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will flow rivers of living water!" But he said this concerning the Spirit, which those believing in him were to receive. For the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Jesus also said:

"I will pray to the Father and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive him because it does not see him and does not know him. But you know him, because he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans! I will come to you! In a short time, the world will no longer see me, but you will see me.

Because I live, you also will live! In that day, you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, that person is the one who loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love and reveal myself to such a person.”

Jesus again said:

“The one who loves me will keep my word; my Father will love him and We shall come to him and make a home in him. Whoever does not love Me does not keep my words. The word which you hear is not mine, but it belongs to the Father who sent me. I have said these things to you while still living with you.

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit which the Father will send in my Name, will teach you all things and remind you of all that I said to you.”

“But when the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me. You also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

On Pentecost, we have the final fulfillment of the mission of Jesus Christ and the beginning of the messianic age of the Kingdom of God mystically present in this world in the Church of the Messiah.

For this reason, the fiftieth day stands as the beginning of the era which is beyond the limitations of this world, fifty being that number which stands for eternal and heavenly fulfillment in both Jewish and Christian mystical piety: seven times seven, plus one.

It must be noted that the feast of Pentecost is not simply the celebration of an event which took place centuries ago. It is the celebration of what must happen and does happen to us in the Church today.

We all have died and risen with the Messiah-King, and we all have received his Most Holy Spirit. We are the "temples of the Holy Spirit." God's Spirit dwells in us (Rom 8; 1 Cor 2-3, 12; 2 Cor 3; Gal 5; Eph 2-3).

We, by our membership in the Church, have received "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" in the Sacrament of Chrismation. Pentecost has happened to us.

When the Spirit came upon the disciples He came like a mighty wind. He appeared as tongues of fire and descended upon the believers.

As a result of Holy Spirit's presence, the disciples began to proclaim the mighty acts of God and to speak in foreign tongues. Here we see the clear reversal of Babel, when the people tried to build a tower which would reach into heaven.

In Genesis we read that after the flood, "God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "I made man in God's image. So then, increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and have dominion over it." The Church Fathers tell us that Noah and his sons were to go throughout the world, being the image of God.

Genesis continues: "Now the whole earth was one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and dwelt there."

This was in disobedience to God's command to go throughout the world, being the image of God, instead they decided to settle in the land of Shinar.

The story continues: "Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them with fire." They had brick for stone and asphalt for mortar. They also said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower, whose top will reach to heaven; and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the sons of men built. Then the Lord said, "Indeed, the people are one race and one language, and they have begun to do what they said. Now they will not fail to accomplish what they have undertaken.

Come, let Us go down there and confuse their language, so they may not understand one another's speech." So, the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city and the tower.

Therefore, its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the languages of all the earth; and from there the Lord God scattered them abroad over the face

of all the earth.”

At Shinar, the people sought to build a tower to “make a name for themselves” and settle there, although God had told them to go throughout the world, being the image of God. Instead they formed a false unity and decided to proclaim their own mighty works, instead of the mighty works of God.

In Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost when peoples had gathered together from every nation under heaven to worship, God gave the gift of foreign languages to his people to remove the language barrier. He equipped his disciples with the necessary tools to make clear the glorious truths of the Gospel.

A true unity, a new race of Christians was formed. Here we see the mercy of God triumphing over judgment. No longer would mankind be hopelessly divided and confused.

The Son of God had died and has resurrected humanity in His flesh. Now the Spirit comes to indwell in the church and the individuals therein, and to graft them into this new race, this new humanity, which is the body of Christ (Eph. 2:11-22,4:7-16) so that with one voice we might glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, never to be divided again.

Now the primary commission which had been given to our first parents to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it and rule over it, would be accomplished in history by the power of the Holy Spirit.

What our first parents and their offspring could not do, the Church would now do victoriously by bringing the gospel of God's grace to the whole world, restoring his fallen image in man by the preaching the Word of God and healing mankind through the holy Sacraments.

We see this reality fulfilled as we observe the immediate effect the presence of the Spirit had upon the disciples. What was for a time a small band huddled in prayer in an upper room in fear of the Jewish authorities became a mighty army testifying publicly and from house to house about the Lord Jesus.

St. Peter went from denying the Lord in cowardice to preaching to thousands in the streets of Jerusalem.

Thus a few people in a short time became a congregation of thousands, spread to Rome, India, Egypt, Gaul, Britain, and to the extremities of our world, leaving the marks of the Spirit's presence wherever they went.

The marks of the Holy Spirit are transformed lives, fervent worship, abounding love, and the true unity which would forever serve as the proof that Babel had been overcome by Pentecost.

The healing of human divisions has taken place. The reunion of mankind is at hand. The great hope of mankind is not the governments of the world. The great hope for mankind is the Holy Spirit!

And we Christians are children of Pentecost not of Babel and guided by the Holy Spirit must proclaim the Gospel by our lives throughout the world and not be afraid to live as Jesus has taught us.