

Background Notes for Pentecost Topic

When we return from our holiday we are still in the Liturgical Season of Easter.

After His resurrection, Jesus showed Himself to His disciples at various times and in various ways. One of the most poignant manifestations of His risen glory is the revelation to the two disciples making their way to Emmaus.

Christ approached these travelers and began to walk with them. Mysteriously restrained from recognizing Jesus, the two were incredulous that this “stranger” was unaware of the newsmaking events of the past several days. Then, Jesus “interpreted to them what referred to Him in all the Scriptures” (Saint Luke 24:27).

Amazed by the wisdom and knowledge of Jesus, the disciples uttered a cry of the heart that still reverberates in the souls of believers everywhere: “Stay with us.” Three short words sum up the servants’ appeal to their Master.

Only Christ—the Christ of the cross and the empty tomb—can make sense of the trials that confront a person. “Stay with us” gives God “permission” to remain in our lives through the invisible but nevertheless real principle of grace.

“Hidden in the obscurity of faith, God draws near our soul, makes Himself our traveling companion, and still more, lives in us by grace.” True, one may feel, because he does not understand the workings of the Lord, that God has abandoned him. But, “God is there, God remains with us; it is for us to remain with Him.”

When Christ vanished before the eyes of the two disciples after the breaking of the Bread, Cleophas and his unnamed companion could have melted into lethargy. Their Master had left; they were seemingly by themselves. But instead of becoming passive, they quickly journeyed to tell the Eleven what had transpired. Although Jesus had temporality departed, His presence remained.

The Resurrection, a far cry from a one-day event, is a life-changer. The happiness to be found in the Risen Lord remains with us because of His abiding presence. Despite life’s difficulties and pain, the joy of the Resurrection is always there for one who believes. St. Augustine, who knew his share of hardships, remarked: “We are an Easter people, and alleluia is our song.”

Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death. When we pray, “Stay with us,” we have the assurance that He has heard us. For just as the stone was rolled away from His tomb, so will our own burdens become manageable.

The Ascension

The Ascension of Our Lord, a Holy Day of Obligation, celebrates the day that Christ, in the presence of His apostles, ascended bodily into Heaven. The Ascension occurred on the 40th day of Easter, so it falls on a Thursday, and thus is often called Ascension Thursday; however, the celebration of the Ascension has been transferred to the following Sunday, six weeks after Easter 2014. This year Ascension Thursday falls on May 29, 2014

Pentecost

After Easter Sunday, Christmas is the second-greatest feast in the Christian liturgical calendar, but Pentecost Sunday is not far behind. Coming 50 days after Easter and ten days after the Ascension of Our Lord, Pentecost marks the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles. For that

reason, it is often called the "the birthday of the Church." This year Pentecost falls on Sunday, June 8, 2014.

Pentecost Sunday is one of the most ancient feasts of the Church, celebrated early enough to be mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (20:16) and St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (16:8). It supplants the Jewish feast of Pentecost, which took place 50 days after the Passover and which celebrated the sealing of the Old Covenant on Mount Sinai.

Type of Feast: Solemnity.

- **Readings:** Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13, or Galatians 5:16-25; John 20:19-23 or John 15:26-27; 16:12-15 (full text here)
- **Prayers:** Novena to the Holy Ghost; Prayer for the Gifts of the Holy Spirit; Act of Consecration to the Holy Spirit; Come Holy Spirit; Litany of the Holy Spirit
- **Other Names for the Feast:** Whit Sunday, Whitsun, Whit

History:

The Acts of the Apostles recounts the story of the original Pentecost (Acts 2). Jews from all over were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish feast. On that Sunday, ten days after the Ascension of Our Lord, the Apostles and the Blessed Virgin Mary were gathered in the Upper Room, where they had seen Christ after His Resurrection:

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them: And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak. [Acts 2:2-4]

Christ had promised His Apostles that He would send His Holy Spirit, and, on Pentecost, they were granted the gifts of the Spirit. The Apostles began to preach the Gospel in all of the languages that the Jews who were gathered there spoke, and about 3,000 people were converted and baptized that day.

The Birthday of the Church:

That is why Pentecost is often called "the birthday of the Church." On this day, with the descent of the Holy Spirit, Christ's mission is completed, and the New Covenant is inaugurated. It's interesting to note that St. Peter, the first pope, was already the leader and spokesman for the Apostles on Pentecost Sunday (see Acts 2:14ff).

In years past, Pentecost was celebrated with greater solemnity than it is today. In fact, the entire period between Easter and Pentecost Sunday was known as Pentecost (and it still is called Pentecost in the Eastern churches, both Catholic and Orthodox). During those 50 days, both fasting and kneeling were strictly forbidden, because this period was supposed to give us a foretaste of the life of Heaven. In more recent times, parishes celebrated the approach of Pentecost with the public recitation of the Novena to the Holy Ghost.

While most parishes no longer publicly recite this novena, many individual Catholics do. You can take part in the novena by signing up for a free e-mail reminder for the Novena to the Holy Ghost.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

On Pentecost Sunday, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles, they were granted the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Those gifts helped them to fulfill their mission to preach the Gospel to all nations. For us, too, those gifts--granted when we are infused with sanctifying grace, the life of God in our souls--help us to live a Christian life.

- Wisdom
- Understanding
- Counsel

- Fortitude
- Knowledge
- Piety
- Fear of the Lord

The Fruits of the Holy Spirit

After Christ's Ascension into Heaven, the Apostles knew that He had promised to send His Spirit, but they didn't know exactly what that would mean. Granted the gifts of the Spirit at Pentecost, however, they were emboldened to speak the Good News to all men. On that first Pentecost Sunday, over 3,000 people were converted and baptized.

The example of the Apostles shows that the gifts of the Holy Spirit lead to the fruits of the Holy Spirit--works that we can only perform through the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Novena to the Holy Ghost

Between Ascension Thursday and Pentecost Sunday, the Apostles and the Blessed Virgin Mary spent nine days in prayer, waiting for the fulfillment of Christ's promise to send His Spirit. This was the origin of the novena, or nine-day prayer, that became one of the most popular forms of Christian intercessory prayer (prayer asking God for something).

From the earliest days of the Church, the period between Ascension and Pentecost has been celebrated by praying the Novena to the Holy Ghost, asking God the Father to send His Spirit and to grant us the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Other Prayers to the Holy Spirit

While the Novena to the Holy Ghost is most often prayed between Ascension and Pentecost, it can be prayed at anytime we find ourselves in particular need of the strength that the Holy Spirit grants through His gifts.

There are many other prayers to the Holy Spirit that are appropriate both for Pentecost and for all year long. When the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles, He appeared as tongues of fire. Living as Christians means letting that fire burn within us every day, and for that, we need the constant intercession of the Holy Spirit.

- Prayer to the Holy Ghost
- Prayer for the Gifts of the Holy Spirit
- Litany of the Holy Spirit
- Prayer to the Holy Spirit for a Favour
- Come Holy Spirit
- Act of Consecration to the Holy Spirit