

Today is The Day of Pentecost, a very special day in the life of the Church. This is the day that, according to the Acts of the Apostles, God gave the Church the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Acts story tells us that the Holy Spirit came surprisingly and quickly upon the Apostles, giving them the spiritual strength, courage and abilities necessary to build the Church of Christ.

This morning's reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, tells us what it was like on that day. Our Lord's closest disciples were meeting together in a room, somewhere in the city of Jerusalem, when suddenly the Holy Spirit joined them, visibly and experientially. Luke, who wrote the Acts of the Apostles, said that the Spirit appeared as a rushing wind, followed by tongues of fire resting on the heads of each of the Apostles. But while the gift of the Spirit is the essence of Pentecost, the symbols of wind and fire, and the strange thing of speaking in tongues are not the essence, and we do well not to exaggerate them. What we need to take from the story is that the Apostles experienced a theophany, a sudden and very visible appearance of God in a concrete way that left them doubtless of God's presence and God's intent. They knew in an instant that they were empowered to do the work of Christ in the world and that every gift and skill needed to spread the gospel throughout the ancient world was theirs, the gifts of God necessary to build Christ's Church and reveal him as Savior of the world.

Scripture tells us that immediately the Apostles begin to proclaim the Risen Lord to any in earshot, leaning out the windows to proclaim him to the crowds in the street. And as we know, in the days, weeks and years ahead, they went throughout the known world, even as far away as India, preaching Jesus and building his Church. They had phenomenal success, and the Church grew rapidly everywhere that the Apostles went. The history of the Church is a long history, and the Church has known many problems and many challenges. But, the message today is the same message preached by the Apostles of old. It is the same message proclaimed each Sunday in our creeds. It is the message contained in our Sunday readings and hopefully the message always heard from this pulpit. The message is this: Jesus Christ is Lord. He is Lord of all the Earth. He is the Prince of Peace, the Son of God and the King of Heaven. He is the Messiah, the Redeemer. Those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God, who put their faith in him, who accept him as Lord and Savior and are baptized into his death and resurrection have, by the promise of Almighty God, eternal life.

Many years have passed since the first Pentecost, and the Church has been shaped time and again by its history. But the essentials remain the same: one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of us all. The Church continues and will continue until the end of the ages because the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father through the Son, remains with us as our enabler and guide. The Church of Jesus Christ lives in and through the Holy Spirit doing Christ's work in this world. *Amen.*