

Today is the Feast of Pentecost, a major Church feast day. Some call it the birthday of the Church. In a way it is, because this day celebrates the Holy Spirit coming to the Church and empowering the Church to do Christ's work.

The story that we read this morning, in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, tells us what that day of Pentecost was like. On the fiftieth day in Resurrected time, the Jewish Feast of Weeks, or *Pentecost* in the Greek of the New Testament, our Lord's apostles were together in a house somewhere in Jerusalem, wondering what to do next. According to Saint Luke, who wrote Acts, very suddenly a sound of rushing wind, accompanied by dancing flames, filled the room. The flames lit things up, but burned nothing. Just as suddenly, the apostles received every gift from God needed to proclaim that Jesus is Lord. The Holy Spirit equipped the apostles to know Christ and make him known, so that the world, through Christ, might be redeemed.

Think what you like about the foreign tongues part of the story. Charismatic Christians consider it the gift of speaking in tongues, glossolalia, or speaking in "unknown tongues." The problem with glossolalia is that no one understands it. These pentecostal claims aside, glossolalia is not really what Saint Luke was talking about in the Acts of the Apostles. Most biblical scholars, at least those in of mainstream Christianity, think that on the Day of Pentecost the Apostles spoke Aramaic just like they did every other day of the year. What happened is that everybody, including those who did not speak Aramaic, could understand what the apostles were saying, and comprehend it perfectly. They heard it as clearly as if it were spoken in their native languages. In Christian doctrine, the apostles' speech transcended language barriers because the Holy Spirit acted as translator. And, what the apostles said that day is that God loves the world so much that he sent his only Son, to die for us that we might live as a forgiven people. The apostles told the multitude that even though the world had killed God's Son, Jesus Christ, God the Father overturned the sentence of death and that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. Hope exists because of God's redemptive work in Jesus the Christ.

Pentecost celebrates the empowering of the Church to preach Jesus, to make him known. Pentecost also tells us that in Christ we are one. In Christ, Saint Paul said, there is neither male, female, Greek, Jew, slave or free, we are all one in Christ Jesus. This inclusiveness is symbolized by the story of the foreign tongues. It is further emphasized in Paul's teaching that the Holy Spirit gives each of us the gifts we need to be Christ to our neighbor. He taught that though our gifts differ, together they bring completion to the Church. And, he reminds us that even though different, we are one body in Christ, because there is one Lord, one faith one baptism, one God and Father of us all. This is a most important message the Church, today to hear - to read, mark learn and inwardly digest. We are called to unity, not division, in Jesus Christ. In that unity, and only in that unity, are we free to be ourselves and to know Christ and make him known. *Amen.*