

Acts 2:1–21
Pentecost
KELC/Trinity, Frankfurt
May 28, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Today, the Church celebrates the Feast of Pentecost, when we focus on the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, who then works through the disciples to take the Gospel into all nations. For 40 days after His death and Resurrection, our risen Lord appeared to the disciples to speak about the Kingdom of God. Jesus told the disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for “the promise of the Father,” meaning the Holy Spirit. As John the Baptist baptized with water, so now would Jesus baptize with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. Right before He ascended into Heaven, Jesus then told the Apostles: “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The giving of the Holy Spirit with all His gifts prompted the Apostles to take the Gospel message into all the world. But Pentecost was not a one-time event. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is rooted in the Old Testament and continues in the Church today wherever the Word of God is proclaimed.

Ten days after Jesus ascended into Heaven, so 50 days after Easter, “the day of Pentecost arrived” and the disciples were together in Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded them. For us Christians, we often hear the word “Pentecost” and our mind jumps immediately to the event we’re celebrating today, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the apostles. However, the holiday known as “Pentecost” goes all the way back to the Old Testament, when the LORD established Israel’s liturgical calendar at Mt. Sinai. In Leviticus 23, God told the people what festivals to

celebrate. The three main festivals, the pilgrim festivals, were Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Booths—when it was required for all Jewish men to come to Jerusalem to sacrifice and celebrate.

In the New Testament, the pilgrim festivals serve as the background for Jesus's life and work. In the Gospel of John, Jesus goes to the Feast of Booths, where He teaches the crowds about the living water, or the Holy Spirit, who will flow out of the hearts of those who believe in Jesus (John 7:37–39). At the age of 12, Jesus went up to Jerusalem with His family to celebrate the Passover. That's when Jesus stayed behind in the Temple and amazed the teachers of the Law with His understanding (Luke 2:41ff.). At His last Passover celebration in Jerusalem, Jesus took the usual Passover meal and transformed it into the Lord's Supper, as we hear about on Maundy Thursday and celebrate each week in Holy Communion. And so it is appropriate that 50 days after the Passover—50 days after Easter—our Lord takes the Jewish Feast of Pentecost and transforms it into something new.

The original festival of Pentecost from the Old Testament is called Pentecost from the Greek word for “fifty,” seeing as it was celebrated fifty days after the Passover. God commanded the sacrifice of seven lambs, one bull, and two rams as a burnt offering, and a male goat for the sin offering as well as two male lambs for a peace offering. God also said: “you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD. You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved . . . they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the LORD” (Lev 23:17). The original Pentecost was a festival of firstfruits, giving back to God the first and the best in recognition that all good things come from His loving hand.

The Old Testament celebration of Pentecost pointed ahead to Jesus, who is referred to as the true firstfruits: the first to be buried in the ground like a seed and then to rise from the dead

and live and reign for all eternity. The Apostle Paul calls Jesus “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor 15:20–23). Jesus died the death that all sinners deserve that He might rise from the dead and give new life to all who by the power of the Holy Spirit trust in Him. The Resurrection of our Lord is just the firstfruits. The rest of the harvest, your bodily resurrection, will follow when Jesus returns to raise all the dead and deliver the Kingdom to God the Father.

So in the New Testament, Pentecost remains a festival of firstfruits. Jews from all over the known world were in Jerusalem to celebrate the occasion. The apostles were all together when suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Our Lord’s ministry began with a physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit, who descended from Heaven in the form of a dove and rested on Jesus at His Baptism. So too did the disciples’ ministry truly begin in earnest with a physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit, this time as tongues of fire. The disciples became the firstfruits of our Lord’s harvest, filled with the Holy Spirit to preach the mighty works of God in the languages of the world.

Peter then preached with an authority and confidence he hadn’t yet known. He interprets the Old Testament Scriptures in light of Christ and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Peter preaches: “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” The people were cut to the heart, repented of their sins, and received forgiveness in Holy Baptism. Men, women, and children were born again

that day of water and the spirit in Baptism. They received the gift of the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. Three thousand souls were added to the Church on that first Christian Pentecost. They were firstfruits of a harvest that continues down to our own day, and will continue until our Lord returns.

Jesus Christ is the firstfruits, and all who are in Christ are also called firstfruits—all who believe and are baptized into our Lord's death and Resurrection. St. Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica that God chose them "as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth." As all believers, they were called by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 2:13–14). In James 1[:18], Christians are again called the firstfruits. James says that God the Father, of His own will, "brought us forth by the Word of Truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." All Christians are firstfruits of the Lord, the first crop of a larger harvest.

In Baptism you, like the 3,000 on that first Christian Pentecost, were united to Christ in His death and resurrection, becoming with Jesus firstfruits. In Baptism, you received the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, who now dwells in you as in a Temple. And as Paul says: "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through the Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom 8:11). The entire fallen creation groans for that day when the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality. "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:23). The Holy Spirit given to you in Baptism bears witness with your spirit that you are children of God (Rom 8:16). The Holy Spirit is the guarantee that the redemption of your

body is yet to come. As Christ died and rose again from the dead, so too, will those who believe and are baptized into Him. Already now you have the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit by faith, with the complete harvest, the resurrection of your body, to follow in eternal life.

The Jews who were gathered in Jerusalem from all over the world to celebrate Pentecost then went back into all the world telling in their own languages the mighty works of God. They laid the groundwork for the coming of the Apostles and the expansion of the Early Church to the ends of the earth. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the seed of God's Word was taken into all the world. Some planted, others watered, but God gave the growth (1 Cor 3:6). And the LORD added to their number day by day those who were being saved, even as the LORD continues adding to that number. The seed of God's Word is still planted and watered. It still grows and produces fruit in abundance the world over.

At Pentecost, we continue celebrating the firstfruits who are gathered whenever and wherever the Holy Spirit brings to remembrance everything Jesus told us, that is, whenever and wherever the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity. Baptized into Christ Jesus, you become firstfruits of God, awaiting the day when the entire harvest is brought in. And like all those new disciples from the first Christian Pentecost, you too go into all the world, wherever the Lord has put you and wherever the Lord will send you, bringing the Word of God with you. Wherever the Word of God is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit is poured out like spring showers over the fields. There the Lord is gathering a people for Himself, adding to our number, to the Christian Church, day by day those who are being saved. We celebrate Pentecost today as an ongoing feast, knowing that the Holy Spirit is continually poured out wherever God's Word is proclaimed until the entire harvest is brought in at the Last Day.