

Title: Pentecost (Acts 2:1)

Today we celebrate Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. On this day 2000 years ago the Holy Spirit was sent to dwell with Christ's people. It was there that the power of the Holy Spirit came into the apostles, in order that THEY be witnesses to Christ. At our baptism we joined that Body. At our baptism, the power of the Holy Spirit came into us that we be witnesses to Christ. Amen.

I want to read our second reading for today Acts 2:1

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them

The birthday of the Church!
The first Pentecost
Or was it?

I don't know if you noticed Acts 2:1 starts with a very peculiar sentence:
"when the day of Pentecost came, they were all together...."

"When the day of Pentecost came???"

What do they mean by that? If Pentecost celebrates the birth of the church, if Pentecost is when the Holy Spirit first comes upon the church, then how could the disciples gather on "day of Pentecost" before Pentecost is established, before the Holy Spirit manifested himself? Technically, Pentecost hadn't come yet. It was going to come that day. So why did Luke write these cryptic words in the book of Acts "*when the day of Pentecost came?*" How could they meet on Pentecost, when Pentecost had not yet come? Is this an error? Did Luke make a boo-boo?

Actually, he did not. In fact, it is a very significant statement. Historically speaking, there are actually two Pentecosts... one Jewish and one Christian... The word Pentecost, a Greek word meaning 50 days, was the Greek name for "Shavuot," the Jewish "festival of weeks." It was a harvest festival, 50 days after the beginning of harvest time. So, when the disciples are gathered in the upper room, as Luke said, "*on the day of Pentecost,*" the "Pentecost" they were celebrating was the Jewish Pentecost, the Shavuot, the festival of weeks.

Now the fact that it was Shavuot is meaningful. During the festival of Shavuot, not only would they celebrate the wheat harvest, but they would remember other things as well,

things like the giving of the Torah, (the 10 commandments) to Moses on Mt. Sinai. On that day, God told the Israelites,

“you shall be my treasured people from all peoples, you will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of bondage.”

So, Shavuot celebrated the day the Lord established Israel as His people. This is very significant and sets the stage for the Christian Pentecost. In this way, the two Pentecosts are related. In a miracle centuries later, God comes upon his people again at the Christian Pentecost and establishes his people anew. In sending His Holy spirit upon the disciples of Christ He establishes a new Israel as his People. God establishes the Christian church, the body of Christ, as his people.

Furthering the connection between the two Pentecosts... there were many people at Mt Sinai, who did not respond to God. Likewise, there were many at the Christian Pentecost who did not respond to Jesus. The significance of “those who did not respond” is almost as important as that of “those who did.” Why were there people who did not respond? As Christians this is always puzzling. We something great is offered to people, at no cost, it is hard for us to understand how someone could say “no”. The explanation is that the people of this world are blind to God. The people of this world assume that everything they see in this world can be explained by natural forces... natural phenomena. So for them, anything which appears supernatural, is simply some type of magic trick. That’s what they think. So, an offer which sounds too good to be true... for them... isn’t. So, when they are confronted with “The Supernatural,” the real Supernatural... when they are confronted by God... their first response will be to dismiss it. When they are confronted with a real witness about something really supernatural, or better yet, someONE supernatural they want to dismiss it. They try to explain away the power of God as the result of natural forces.

This is precisely what happened at the day of Pentecost, Jesus’ Pentecost, the Christian Pentecost. When the Galileans began speaking in other known languages, the Jews sought to explain away what they saw with natural explanations. Since the Galileans (the disciples) were using words beyond their own language, the Jews explained it away by saying “they were drunk.” Despite the fact that they saw a visual tongues of flame landing on all the disciples, they still sought to explain away what their eyes and ears saw. They sought to give natural explanations for the miracles they saw and heard... and they simply ignored the things they couldn’t explain.

But what really happened at Pentecost? After the Jews tried to explain away the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter said,

“Fellow Jews, and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!”

Right here Peter points out the obvious. A man just did not drink that early... Not only that but the crowd even testifies that they heard God’s truth proclaimed to them in their own language.

Acts 2:8

Utterly amazed, they asked... “how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites... Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome

This truth made it clear that the Galileans were not speaking gibberish because they were drunk, but were actually speaking knowledgably in foreign tongues. It was a miracle! The speaking of foreign tongues was a miracle. It was a witness to those who were present, that the power of God was present, a witness to those present, that they might come to believe.

Peter then quotes the words of the prophet Joel and reminded all who could hear, that “what they saw taking place” was the fulfillment of a prophecy. He reminded them that it was the Holy Spirit who would cause prophecy to come out of the mouths of everyday people, that their...

“Sons, daughters, young men, women, servants would in the last days testify to the power of God.”

And that was exactly what was happening right there. In fulfillment of scripture, they were witnessing the Holy Spirit of God working right in front of them. The witness of the Holy Spirit was right before them, testifying to the truth of the Gospel of salvation which the disciples were sharing. At Pentecost, the gospel was shared in many languages, as a witness to the people of the world, a witness which spoke of God’s desire that ALL men be saved. God’s offer of salvation was given to all men. God’s offer was to all men but there was also a warning... The warning? There will come a time when it is “too late”.

The Holy Spirit continues to do miracles today. That same Holy Spirit is at work within us, and among us, today. And like before, when He works his miracles, there are still those who deny it, reject it. There are still those who wish to explain the miracles of God, as natural phenomena and in doing so, they reject the Gospel message which comes with it. They do not wish to see His work. and as a result, they remain blind. And if they remain in this blindness, this denial, they are in danger of damnation.

Just like the miracle of Pentecost, the greatest of miracles worked by the Holy Spirit is our baptism. Our baptism is a great miracle! At our baptism, the Holy Spirit comes down upon us, like he did on Pentecost and claims us as his own, and fills us with his power. Our baptism is a great miracle. Having said this, there are many who reject that. They would reduce it to a simple ceremony, a rite by which we become members of a church. The truth is, baptism is a great miracle. At our Baptism we received power, power from God, power of the Holy Spirit.

Let me explain... When people think of the power of God, most times they think of great miracles. The splitting of the Red Sea, laying hands on the sick and healing them, speaking in tongues, etc. But the primary work of the Holy Spirit, the primary miracle that He does is not physical, but spiritual. The primary miracle which the Holy Spirit does is “bringing faith” to non-believers. Just so you know why this is a miracle, let me explain. Scripture says we were dead in our sins. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have new life. The relationship that mankind had at creation, has now been restored in those who have faith in Christ. That is the primary work of the Holy Spirit. He has made “the dead” rise. The Holy Spirit took those who were dead in their sins and made them alive in Christ. The Holy spirit has raised us from death (spiritual death) to life. In God’s eyes, this is a greater miracle than raising someone from physical death. At our baptism God has given us the promise personally that THAT same Holy Spirit is at work within us, that the same miracle of faith has been worked in us. Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to dwell within us. As the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us, he works in us, in such a way that we become more like Christ, he empowers us in such a way that we accomplish Christ’s work on Earth.

At the first Pentecost the power of the Holy Spirit came into the apostles, empowering them to be witnesses to Christ. The power of the Holy Spirit has come into you in order that YOU be a witness to Christ. My brothers and sisters we are so blessed. Through faith we accept the reality of the power of God. We are comforted by that knowledge. We know there is power and purpose beyond the things of this world. We know that there is purpose for us stretching into eternity.

God’s offer of salvation is infinite.

God’s offer of salvation is to the entire world.

But God’s offer is finite in time. There will be a time when it is too late.

There are billions of people who still think that the Gospel is nothing more than an illusion. There are people who try to explain away the miracles of God as natural phenomena. They do not see God, because they refuse to see God. And if they continue to live in disbelief they reject the very miracle of the Holy Spirit. And there will be a time when “It is too late.”

But the good news is that, TODAY! there is still time. Today, God is calling you to share the good news of Jesus Christ with someone who needs to hear it. Remember, it is not your power which brings faith. It is the power of the Holy Spirit. But God has provided you with the Holy Spirit, that you might bring the good news God’s love comfort and hope, to all. Share with people the promises which God has given you. And may the power of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost, reach the people who you touch. amen