

**Pentecost Sunday
(Year A)**

Acts 2:1-11—The Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost

1. Pentecost: Greek for “fiftieth [day]” (Greek *pentecostē*; Hebrew *Shebuoth*)
 - a. Pilgrimage: all adult men had to travel to Jerusalem (Deut 16:16)
 - b. Harvest: first fruits; seven weeks after Passover (Lev 23:15-17)
 - b. Memorial: of the giving of the law at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-20)
2. Descent of the Holy Spirit: new Mount Sinai
 - a. A “sound from heaven” like a mighty wind (2:2)
 - b. “Tongues as of fire” descended upon them (2:3)
 - c. “Filled with the Holy Spirit” (Greek *pneumatōs hagiou*); Why tongues of fire?
 - d. Mount Sinai: “*the Lord descended upon it in fire*” (Exod 19:18)
3. The Miracle of Tongues: undoing the Tower of Babel
 - a. Begin to speak in “other tongues” = other languages (Greek *heterais glōssais*)
 - b. Disciples are Galileans but each person hears “his own native language” (2:8)
 - c. Why tongues? *Reversal* of the Tower of Babel (cf. Pentecost Vigil Mass)

“Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. *Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth...* (Genesis 11:7-9)

Psalm 104—Lord, Send out your Spirit, and Renew the Face of the Earth

1. Prayer for God to send forth his “spirit/breath/wind” (Hebrew *ruach*) (104:30)

1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13—the Various “Gifts” of the Spirit

1. Varieties of “gifts” (Greek *charismatōn*) (12:4) for benefit to the Church

John 20:19-23—Jesus Breathes on the Disciples

1. Jesus Breathes on the Disciples: “Receive the Holy Spirit” (20:22; cf. Gen 2:7)
2. Why Twice? They receive it “in part” now, but “in its fullness” at Pentecost (see Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 17.12)

The Catechism on the Mystery of Pentecost

1. Easter: Outpouring of the Holy Spirit: “fulfills Christ’s Passover” (CCC 731)
2. The Trinity: on Pentecost, “the Holy Trinity is fully revealed” (CCC 732)

Augustine on the Mystery of Pentecost

The tongues in which they spoke as the Holy Spirit filled them were a foreshadowing of the Church’s preaching of the Gospel in the tongues of all the nations. After the flood, in pride and defiance of the Lord, an impious generation erected a high tower and so

brought about the division of the human race into many language groups... At Pentecost, by contrast, the humble piety of believers brought all these diverse languages into the unity of the Church. What discord had scattered, love was to gather together. (Augustine, *Sermon 271*; trans. E. Barnecut, 1992, p. 73)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (Pentecost, Year A)

1. Review the Jewish meaning of the feast of Pentecost (Leviticus 23; Exodus 19-20). What light does the Jewish meaning of the feast shed on the Christian celebration?

2. What is the meaning of the miracle of the disciples speaking in “other tongues”? Why do you think God reveals that humanity will not be united through its own power, but through the power of the Holy Spirit working in the Church?

3. Review the *Catechism’s* teaching on the mystery of Pentecost and the person of the Holy Spirit (CCC) and the sacrament of Confirmation (CCC 1302-1304). What role does the Holy Spirit and the graces of confirmation play in your daily life? What role do they play in your spreading and bearing witness to the faith?

For Further Study

1. CCC 687-747, 1302-1305: the Church’s official teaching on the person of the Holy Spirit. Extremely rich discussion.
2. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World* (1986; available at www.vatican.va); a rich meditation on the role of the Holy Spirit. Not an easy read, but rewarding.
3. Yves Congar, O.P. *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (3 vols.; New York: Crossroad, 1997). A classic study of the history and theology of the Holy Spirit; although a long and advanced study, extremely rich and rewarding read for those interested in the role of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of the Church.
4. Edith Barnecut, *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels Year A* (New York: New City Press, 1992), 72-73.