

## Pentecost - 2022

**Vigil Mass: Gen 11:1-9; Ps 103; Rom 8:22-27; John 7:37-39**

**Mass during Day: Act 2:1-11; Ps 103; Rom 8:8-17; John 14:15-16.23-26**

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A few years ago I used to go regularly to a secure medical unit in order to be the men and women who were within its walls. I met a young woman there once who was a Pentecostalist. This means that she belonged to a group of Christians who by and large believe that if you are devout then the Holy Spirit gives you gifts – called charisma – and if you had these gifts then they should be evident in you, and evident to others. So, happiness, prophesying, and speaking in tongues, being ‘slain by the spirit’ and so on, are marks of authenticity of one’s Christian faith for Pentecostalists and other Charismatic Churches. This young woman was in hospital because she was suffering from depression, and she was suicidal. But she could, she assured me, speak in tongues. She said this as if it was a defence against what ailed her, and as if she had to justify herself to me by authenticating her faith. After our conversation she asked for a blessing and left. She made me a little sad. I know that the Pentecost movement is big, but she made me ask myself, does Pentecost itself always have to be bold and assertive?

It has been 7 weeks, or a week of weeks, 49 days, since Passover. Today is the fiftieth day. In the Jewish calendar today is the feast of ‘Shavout’, also known as the ‘Feast of Weeks.’ It is this feast that Jesus’s disciples were celebrating when the Holy Spirit comes upon them.

We call it ‘Pentecos’t, derived from the Greek word meaning “fiftieth.” So, it is 50 days since Easter.

The parallel with the time between Jewish Passover to Shavout and the time between the Christian Easter to Pentecost is exact in its symbolism. Passover celebrates the freeing of the Jews from slavery out of Egypt: Shavuot celebrates the Jews becoming God’s holy people and the gift of the Law. At Easter we celebrate our slavery to death and sin; at Pentecost Jesus’ disciples receive and accept the gift of freedom in the Holy Spirit. Today the Church, the living body of Christ, is born. It is no wonder that the events and images and Holy Scripture which surround Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, are ones of power: wind, fire, forces of transformation and indeed commotion. But there is something else, and this does not belong to the realm of noise and outward motion. There is stillness. Listen to Jesus’ simple blessing from John’s Gospel which is read during the Mass of the day: ‘*Peace be with you.*’ ‘Peace’ is a word that conveys stillness and quiet, a sense of calm. Then he shows them his wounds. ‘*Peace be with you*’, he says again. And he sends them the Holy Spirit. What is it which is in the character of the Holy Spirit that both great calm and great activity could be simultaneously present?

Now as you know the Holy Spirit bestows the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord, and charity.<sup>1</sup> Have you noticed that these gifts are all God-facing? And have you realised that all of these gifts, from wisdom to charity, can enrich and transform us simply through the approach of prayer, of dialogue and surrender to God? This Jesus at prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

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<sup>1</sup> CCC 768, 798-801, 1830

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You know also the fruits of the Spirit: peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity among them.<sup>2</sup> Have you noticed that these are person-facing; that they transform our relationship towards each-other and that they must be exercised with words and deeds? This is Jesus carrying his cross from the seat of judgement to the place of the skull.

So, to my mind, both stillness and activity are fully in concert with Pentecost, with the coming of the Holy Spirit. Both are necessary to break free from slavery, both are necessary to respond to God. But we do not dictate the response. It is only when we have prayed and listened that we can understand the words: *'If you love me you will keep my commandments'*<sup>3</sup> It is only when we have understood that we can do, that we can actively *'keep'* his commandments. You might be called to hold the hand of a dying friend. You might be called to campaign against an injustice such as abortion or homelessness. You might be called to be a missionary and set the world ablaze with the Gospel. You might simply be called back to prayer. And it is in this peace that I hope my Pentecostalist friend listens to God and has found her peace.

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<sup>2</sup> CCC 1832 Gal 5:22-23

<sup>3</sup> John 14:15