

Pentecost Sunday  
June 4, 2017  
John 20:19-23

My sisters and brothers in Christ,

The Day of Pentecost – when we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That’s usually the way we remember today. But there’s something else that is just as important about today. You remember that our Book of Common Prayer (312) – which carries the tradition of our church – tells us that there are four days in the church year that are “especially appropriate” for Holy Baptism. The Great Vigil of Easter is at the top of the list and has been since the earliest days of our faith. Second in preference is the Day of Pentecost.

Since there are no candidates for baptism today, our Prayer Book encourages us to have a Renewal of Baptismal Vows. We renew our vows a few times a year, not because most of us were infants at our baptism, and we don’t remember the vows that were made in our name by parents and Godparents. We renew our vows so that we can remember them more vividly – so that we can have them up front in our mind and spirit – so that they can be fresh guides for us when we walk out of here and into the world, which can be a hostile place for things of the spirit. This is not another baptism, a second baptism. You recall that in the Nicene Creed “we acknowledge *one* baptism for the forgiveness of sins.” What we do now is a recommitment of our selves.

The Renewal is a statement of *our* faith, or course – that’s why we do not recite the Nicene Creed this morning – we already express our faith in the Vows. The Renewal also is a prescription for what we are to do as Christians – in and for the Church – and in and for the world. We forget these things sometimes. And, in the Renewal we also receive the assurance that God will keep us in eternal life through God’s grace. What we do here this morning is not just carrying on a heart-warming little traditional rite. That’s not the point. This is an important moment for each one of us – it is an important moment in our lives as Christians. We are reaffirming our birth as Christians. It’s not just to invigorate us, though it might do that – it also might make us humble, and more reflective and prayerful about how we carry out our Baptismal Pledge. And we do this on this Day of Pentecost – because this day is prominent in the life of our Church – and therefore in our lives.

Easter Day, the Sunday of the Resurrection – is the greatest feast day in the Christian year. Next in importance is the Day of Pentecost: the second most significant festival of the Christian year. Fortunately Pentecost has not gotten muddied up with all kinds of secularism and commercialism that hide its true nature: like Christmas has. Pentecost has escaped being desecrated. We are not distracted from its meaning – and we can absorb that meaning into our hearts and into our various callings as Christians.

Pentecost is the day on which we as Christians celebrate receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the day on which the Church was born – the birthday of the Church. The Church was not born at Easter, and certainly not at Christmas. It was born when the Risen Christ appeared to the disciples, breathed on them, bestowed his peace on them, and told them to receive the Holy Spirit, and said: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” The Church was born at the moment when the disciples became apostles – when those who had received Christ’s teaching were sent into the world to spread that teaching – to spread the Word, to be witnesses. And that apostolic mission is right there in the Renewal of Vows: “will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?” As baptized Christians, each of us is commissioned an Apostle – an active person in the world.

Our first reading today was Acts 2:1-11. Acts of whom? Acts of the Apostles – not acts of the disciples. Sometimes it's said that this is the only unfinished book of the Bible – because the Apostles have not finished their work. We are still at it – we are still spreading the Word, especially by what we do. Remember that disciples are learners, they are students. Apostles are messengers to the world.

Have you ever considered that without Pentecost, without the gift of the Holy Spirit, without the apostles being sent out – without all that, we never would have heard about the Resurrection, or about Christ, about his love for us, or about God's saving grace? We would not know Christ's story. Pentecost is that important. The events of Pentecost complete Easter. Today fills the void.

When Christ rose from the dead, when Christ ascended to the Father, Christ's followers might have been left with nothing more than a few sayings and some memories of his three years of earthly ministry. They might have been left alone in the world to fend for themselves. But that was not what happened. Christ promised that he would send the Holy Spirit – and it is through the Holy Spirit that Christ is still with us as comforter, teacher, guide. Christ is not gone and forgotten. It is through the Holy Spirit that we sense Christ in our lives. Sometimes the symbol for today is a dove descending. Sometimes it is a flame. After all, how do you draw the Holy Spirit? But it is not so much the picture – it is how we discern, how we sense the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And how we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us – and that is still happening for each of us. That is our personal Pentecost.

I said a few weeks ago that each Sunday is a Little Easter – that we celebrate Christ breaking the bonds of death, that we celebrate his Resurrection. Let us recognize *now* that each Holy Communion becomes a Pentecost through the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the faithful and upon the gifts of bread and wine – transforming those gifts into the body and blood of Christ.

Especially today, take the words of the prayer of consecration into your hearts – as we pray that the Holy Spirit may descend upon us, and upon the gifts, showing them to be holy gifts for God's holy people.

As you hold out your hands for Communion, receive not only the bread and the cup. Also receive Christ's first gift. Receive the Holy Spirit. ✠