

**Pentecost**  
**May 15, 2016**

We might think of Pentecost Sunday as something like the church's Fourth of July celebration. It's not just the attention-getting sound, the fireworks and the excitement, but the here-comes-everybody reunion of a multinational crowd of people who all heard a message and allowed themselves to get caught up in its power.

And it was even more than that. Instead of all that excitement and commotion leading to confusion, everybody understood what was being communicated – to the point that they were actually confused by the fact of clear communication.

While Luke began his Gospel by writing about a small family of Jewish people and Jesus' birth in a little town in the middle of nowhere, he begins the Acts of the Apostles in the religious center of Judaism with a crowd representing the entire known world.

Pentecost was a big deal! But what does it mean to us? It is, of course, all about the Holy Spirit and today's readings tell us each in their own way that the Spirit is ready to lead us through transformations every bit as clear and bewildering as the events of Luke's story.

Because the narrative in Acts is the only scriptural account of the Pentecost event, today's other readings offer additional perspectives on the gift and effects of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church.

One of the first things we might notice is that every one of the five suggested readings for today's liturgy leads us to reflect on our place in the community of believers. Not one of them speaks of a private experience of the Spirit of God, quite the opposite. The communal dimension is most obvious in the selection from 1 Corinthians

in which Paul uses the image of a body to explain how intimately the members of the community have become identified with one another.

When Paul speaks of the differing gifts within the Body of Christ, he highlights the reality that the more unified the people become, the more their personal identity is strengthened. The more they get involved as integral parts of the community, the more their individual gifts are brought out in service to others.

The more they understand their particular call from the Lord, their unique manifestation of the Spirit, the more they will understand and cherish being part of the whole body of Christ.

It is much like the Christian ideal that calls for all to give what they can and receive what they need. Everyone who is a part of it can live well. And St. Paul calls this body the Body of Christ, and that orients this community beyond itself. This is where St. John's rendition of the gift of the Spirit comes in.

Instead of a Pentecost 50 days after Easter, John's gospel portrays Jesus bestowing the Spirit on his disciples on the evening of the First Day - the day of the Resurrection.

As the disciples were huddled together for mutual protection, Jesus became present among them and blessed them with his peace. Then he sent them out and with his next breath he filled them with his own Spirit.

The Spirit Jesus shared gave them power for the two-fold work of reconciliation. Just as Jesus had offered peace to his failed disciples, they were commissioned to do the same for others, freeing them from being defined by a sinful past so that they could enjoy peace with God.

The disciples were also sent to do as Jesus had done in denouncing those whose closed minds or systems impede the spread of God's peace in the universe. The ones whose sins are retained are those who are closed in on themselves.

In the words of Pope Francis, they have hearts "open only to the limited horizon of their own immanence and interests, and as a consequence they neither learn from their sins nor are they genuinely open to forgiveness" (*Joy of the Gospel*, 97).

The Feast of Pentecost is meant to be a real celebration that reminds us of the unfathomable power we have been given to create a community of universal solidarity. Pentecost celebrates the fact that the Gospel can be understood in every time and culture because it fulfills the deepest yearning of human hearts.

With all of our sometimes bewildering differences, Pentecost tells us that we are all such a part of one another that sharing God's peace really is possible. That is the message we are called to believe and proclaim by the way we live. And to the extent that we truly believe that message, it will become true.