

Today we celebrate the Day of Pentecost. We know that the term Pentecost is associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit and with the birth of the Church. But if the Holy Spirit *came* at Pentecost, where was He before that? And what does Pentecost mean? What does it mean for the Church and what does it mean for each of us individually?

The name “Pentecost” is the Greek term for the Jewish Feast of Weeks, which occurred 50 days after the Passover. The Feast of Weeks was the second of the three major Jewish feasts. The name “Feast of Weeks” signifies that it concludes the period of seven weeks – a week of weeks – that began with the presentation of the first shear of the barley harvest during the Passover. So Pentecost was originally an agricultural feast that marked the end of the grain harvest. It was celebrated during the month of Sivan, which for us translates into late May or early June.

But it was on this particular day, the Day of Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit came and visited the apostles in a very particular way. We mark this visitation as the birth, or inauguration of Christ’s one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. So what was the Holy Spirit doing before this? Where was the Holy Spirit before Pentecost?

Well, as we know from our belief and profession of Trinitarian Christian faith, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit exist from eternity. And so, the Holy Spirit was always there. In fact, He is there from almost the very first verse in the Bible. The Holy Spirit first appears in Scripture in the second verse. Genesis 1:2 reads, “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters”. From the moment of creation, the Holy Spirit was present in the world.

And from that we can take what amounts to a working definition of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That is, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is *the manifestation of divine presence and power*. God is present in the world He created through the Holy Spirit.

By presence we do not mean that Holy Spirit was simply “there”. Creativity belongs to the essence of God’s nature. He created the universe. God creates each individual person. As we read in Jeremiah, God says to him, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” God’s presence then, means, among other things, creativity. And it means divine power. The Holy Spirit is the manifestation of God’s presence and power, and this often means creation.

So what was the Holy Spirit doing before the Day of Pentecost when the Church began? The Holy Spirit was preparing the people of God. He was preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity in the flesh, in to the world. As we say from week to week in our liturgy, in the Nicene Creed, we say we believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; we say we believe in one Lord Jesus Christ who for our sake was crucified to take away all our sins; and we say we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who *has spoken by the prophets*. A prime example is the prophet Isaiah. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Isaiah prophesied the coming of Jesus Christ when in the seventh chapter of his book he says, ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.’ And the Holy Spirit continued to tell God’s people of the coming of His Son Jesus Christ through the prophets in the Old Testament. Matthew often quotes the prophet Isaiah to show us how Jesus is the fulfillment of prophesy.

So the Holy Spirit was the manifestation of the presence and power of God creating the expectation of the coming of Christ.

And now that Christ has come, what is the ministry of the Holy Spirit? In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells His followers. Jesus says, “when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me, and you also are witnesses.” Jesus continues, “when He comes, He will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father. When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The Holy Spirit’s ministry, now that Christ has come and has been crucified, resurrected and ascended into heaven is to bear witness to Him and to inspire us to do the same. That means the Holy Spirit, as the manifestation of the presence and power of God, is creating, nurturing and growing the Church.

Imagine what the world would be like if all of a sudden all traces of Christianity were withdrawn. No more Church, no Vatican, no more Bibles, no other Christian books, no Christian schools, no more seminaries, no monasteries or convents, no more Christmas or Easter, no Christian hospitals or charities, no Christian television, no Christian websites. Nothing left in the world to remind us of Jesus.

The fact is we probably cannot imagine such a thing. And the reason we can’t is because we DO have all those things in the world. And the reason we have them is *because the Holy Spirit came just as Jesus said He would*. We have the Church and the New Testament and Christian schools and all the rest of those things I asked

you to imagine not having *because the Holy Spirit is alive and well and working, do His ministry in the world, in the Church and in us.*

The Apostles didn't start the Christian Church all on their own. It's not as if they were sitting around one day after Jesus had died and suddenly one of them said, "Well now what do we do?" And another one said, "Hey I know, let's start a new religion!" That just doesn't happen. A dozen, defeated, dejected, worn out guys, hiding out for fear of their lives, afraid of being executed just like Jesus don't all of a sudden begin boldly proclaiming that Jesus rose from the dead and converting thousands of others to the faith and start planting churches.

In the Acts of the Apostles, immediately after the Holy Spirit visited the apostles, Peter began preaching the Gospel to the crowds. And three thousand people were converted. And the Church was born. And it grew. And it spread. That is the manifestation of the presence and power of God. That is the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

But what does the Holy Spirit mean to us, here, now? Maybe we're not going to be Apostles, or missionaries. Maybe we're not going to be writing great books about Christian theology or history. Maybe we're not going to be working in Christian hospitals or for Christian television.

We're here. We're working our jobs. Or we're retired and doing other things now. We're living our lives. We work in our gardens. We do our grocery shopping. We go to the park. How is the Holy Spirit working in our lives, here and now?

Remember, as Jesus told us, He sent the Holy Spirit to remind us of Him. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is always present to us. We need only to listen for Him.

The Holy Spirit witnesses to the world that Jesus Christ is the Son of God come to redeem us from our sins. The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ to the world. And the Holy Spirit also does those same things for each of us, individually, every moment of our lives.

When we're tempted to do something wrong, the Holy Spirit calls to us not to yield to that temptation and enables us to hold to what is right. The Holy Spirit is not the same thing as our conscience. We can find ways to silence our conscience. The Holy Spirit whispers to us in that still, small voice. And He won't let up. We need only to listen for Him.

When we're facing a difficult time in our lives, whatever it may be: the loss of a loved one, financial difficulties, fear, anxiety, guilt: the Holy Spirit reminds us of Jesus Christ and what He has done for us.

When we've failed morally, when we've sinned, the Holy Spirit calls us to repentance, to come to confession, so that our relationship with Christ is restored and so it can continue to grow.

The Holy Spirit means for each one of us our sanctification: He's there to make us more like Christ. He has the will and the power to do so, the will and power of Almighty God. One of the greatest things I remember from seminary is when I took Ascetical Theology. The professor said that we can't make ourselves like Christ, but the Holy Spirit can, and He's *determined* to do so.

What greater comfort can there be, than knowing that the Holy Spirit of God is always present to us, guiding us, leading us to confess our sins and to know that in Christ we're forgiven, and that He is creating us as we go along, to be new creatures in Christ, in the likeness and character of our Lord and Savior, and is leading us home to be with him forever? That is the ministry of the Holy Spirit, that is what we remember on this Day of Pentecost. Amen.

