

For groups using the new format

(*Facilitator: Follow the instructions shown in italics.*)

Pentecost Sunday

May 20, 2018 B

(*Before starting, allow a few minutes for the members to exchange greetings, then call the group together to prayer.*)

Facilitator: Let us take a minute to consciously place ourselves in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.

(*Pause for a minute.*)

(*Play a religious song if you are able to do so.*)

Opening prayer: *Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful gathered in your name. Enkindle in us the fire of your divine love. Allow your dormant gifts within us to manifest themselves in our lives so that all will know your presence and activity in our lives. Amen.*

(*Prior to your meeting you are encouraged to read the first and second readings and the commentary on them. After the opening prayer, go to the section titled **Proclamation of the Gospel**, i.e., skip the first and second readings as well as the commentaries.*)

FIRST READING: Acts 2:1-11

Luke situates the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. In John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit comes on Easter Sunday evening. In Scripture, it is the *theological* meaning of events that matter and not their *historical chronology*.

In Jewish tradition, *Pentecost* is a harvest feast celebrating the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. It commemorates Israel's covenant with God, the birth of Israel. *Pentecost* (meaning fifty) takes place 50 days after Passover.

Luke has the Holy Spirit come on Pentecost to announce the beginning of a new Israel. The Church will be *universal* in scope. People of *every* nation will be invited to join this new People of God.

The arrival of the Holy Spirit is described in both visual and auditory terms reminiscent of the Old Testament theophanies, (i.e., appearances of God). God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and God spoke to Job from a whirlwind (Job 38:1). The first gift the Spirit imparts is the gift of *tongues*. Perhaps the most miraculous thing about this whole event is the *inner change* it works in the disciples. A group of fear-filled disciples now become bold proclaimers of the Gospel.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 104

This is a hymn of praise to the Creator—God, the One who gives us new life in the Spirit.

SECOND READING: Galatians 5:16-25

Paul contrasts life in the spirit to life in the flesh. Life in the flesh follows earthly passions. Paul names fifteen such passions. When living life in the Spirit, one bears good fruit. Paul lists nine virtues or fruits of the Spirit.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

Facilitator: Let us now listen to this Sunday's Gospel.

(*A member of the group reads the gospel.*)

(*After the reading **pause** . . .*)

Facilitator: *As we listen to the second reading of the Gospel, let's be aware of what draws us in and what might be a challenge for us to embrace.*

Facilitator: *Let us now take a moment to quietly meditate on the Gospel text.*

GOSPEL COMMENTARY

Facilitator: *Let us now read quietly the gospel commentary.*

GOSPEL: John 20:19-23

“On the evening of that first day of the week...Jesus came.” This appearance happens on Easter Sunday evening, the evening of the Resurrection. Jesus comes to a group of frightened disciples (*“The doors were locked for fear of the Jews”*). The fact that Jesus can come through locked doors shows that the “resurrected life” is totally different—not confined by physical obstacles. Yet, by showing them his hands and his side, Jesus is saying that there is a *connection* and *continuity* between the crucified Christ and the resurrected Christ. Also, by showing them his pierced hands and side, Jesus is communicating the *cost* of glory.

Jesus imparts three gifts: *peace, joy* and the *Spirit*. The “*peace*” or *shalom* which Jesus brings replaces the feelings of guilt the disciples must have had for abandoning Jesus in his hour of greatest need. This gift restores harmony to a broken or wounded relationship.

‘Joy’ is what the disciples experience when they see Jesus. This joy at the presence of Jesus replaces the feelings of depression the disciples must have felt during Jesus’ absence.

Then Jesus imparts his Spirit: *“He breathed on them.”* This gesture is reminiscent of God breathing life into Adam (Gen 2:7).

Pentecost is the beginning of a new creation. By his gesture of breathing, Jesus brings to birth his Church. He then commissions those gathered to go forth and forgive sins. *“Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them and whose sins you retain are retained.”* Originally, these words were probably seen as the Church’s prerogative to confer or withhold baptism from those seeking entry into the Church. People who were judged as not truly repentant of their sin or who do not embrace the message of Jesus were refused baptism which, among other things, cleansed the recipient of sin. Later, our Church saw in these words of Jesus the foundation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Facilitator: Break into small groups. If the group is six or more, break into smaller groups of three.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. As you listened to the gospel, what words caught your attention? Why?

2. Who is the Holy Spirit to you? If you have a relationship with the Holy Spirit, how did it begin and develop?

3. In the second reading for this Sunday, Paul names nine fruits of the Spirit, which fruit comes easy enough for you? Which fruit is a challenge for you?

4. What is Jesus saying to you about how a faithful disciple should act?

JOURNALING ON THE WORD

(Gather the group back together.)

Facilitator: Take a few minutes to journal on the word/message you are hearing in this Sunday’s Gospel. You may also wish to use this time to formulate a prayer response to the word. In other words, as you reflect on the Gospel, what do you wish to say to Jesus about what you are hearing him say? Perhaps you may also wish to express how you may need him to help you to live the message. Learning to pray about the message we hear in the Gospel is a significant step in our spiritual growth.

Let us take a few moments to share what we discern as Jesus’ message to us in today’s Gospel.

— Meditation —

The Spirit comes gently and makes himself known by his fragrance. He is not felt as a burden, for he is light.... Rays of light and knowledge stream before him as he approaches. The Spirit comes with a tenderness of a true friend and protector to save, to heal, to teach, to counsel, to strengthen, to console. The Spirit comes to enlighten [our] mind...and through [us], the minds of others....

As light strikes the eyes of [one] who comes out of darkness into the sunshine and enables him to see clearly things he could not discern before, so light [of the Spirit] floods [our souls] and enables [us] to see clearly things...beyond the range of human vision, things hitherto undreamed of.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem
(Quoted in *Essentials of the Faith*, p.79, Fr. Alfred McBride)