Catholic Q&A: Pentecost: Experiencing the Holy Spirit as God

By Fr. Rick Poblocki

The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of Pentecost as being:

“The fiftieth day at the end of the seven weeks following Passover (Easter in the Christian dispensation).  At the first Pentecost after the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit was manifested, given and communicated as a Divine Person to the Church, fulfilling the Paschal Mystery of Christ according to His promise” (726, 731; cf. 1287; also: Cf. Catechism, Glossary, p. 893).

Pentecost is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of Jesus’ promise (CCC, 731; Acts of the Apostles 2:33-36).

The Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles on the feast of Pentecost.  This happened 10 days after the Lord Jesus Ascended into heaven, and 50 days after His Resurrection (Cf. Acts of the Apostles 2:1-4).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church notes:  “Annually the Church celebrates the memory of  the Pentecost events the beginning of the new ‘age of the Church,’ when Christ lives and acts in and with His Church” (Catechism, Glossary, p. 893; cf. 1076).

The Catechism responds by pointing out: “…the Church’s Mission is not an addition to that of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but is its sacrament: in her whole being and in all her members, the Church *is sent* to announce, bear witness, make present, and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity” (Catechism, 738).  So, the Church is an integral part that flows from the “Mission” and saving work of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.  Rejection of the Church’s place in God’s plan of saving people is to reject a huge portion of God’s saving work – which endangers one’s salvation.

*A Fact from our Catholic History:*

*One of the old names for Pentecost is Whitsunday.  Pentecost was called Whitsunday or “White Sunday” because of the white baptismal robes that were worn by those baptized on the Vigil of Pentecost.  Often these white garments were worn for some time afterwords, as a mark of consecration and as a mark of the purity bestowed on their souls through Baptism*

The word Pentecost means “Fiftieth” or “50” in Greek (Catechism, Glossary, p. 893).  The Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles on Pentecost – 50 days after the Lord’s Resurrection.  Pentecost is pronounced “*pen-teck-cost*.”

The Holy Spirit manifested (that is, revealed Himself or made Himself known) through “a strong, driving wind” (Acts 2:2) and “tongues as of fire” (Acts 2:3).

The “wind” recalls the Spirit of God moving over the waters at the creation of the world (Genesis 1:1-2).  The manifestation of the Holy Spirit through the “strong, driving wind” indicates that a “new creation” is taking place: the renewal of humanity in God’s Holy Spirit.  The “tongues of fire” denote the Presence of God, purification, and Judgment.  Traditional catechesis (i.e. training people in the Faith) saw the tongues of fire as signifying the sacredness and divine (God-given) authority of the preaching and teaching of the Apostles, by whose words, fervor, and witness, and example all people were to be converted to the knowledge, love, and service to God.

Yes.  Our Lord Jesus Christ promised to send them – another Paraclete – the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, to teach them all Truth and abide with them forever (see John 14:25-26).

The “sin against the Holy Spirit” is the sin of unrepentance – the refusal to accept God’s mercy and to turn from one’s sins.  God is willing to forgive any sin – but, He leaves it up to us to make the personal and deliberate choice of accepting His love.  If we reject His love, we lose God for all eternity.  This permanent loss of God and heaven is called hell or damnation.

Pentecost was the beginning of the Church’s Mission!  The Holy Spirit was sent by Christ to sanctify the Church.  The Holy Spirit *enlightened* and *strengthened*the Apostles, so they could *preach the Gospel fearlessly*.

The Church was sanctified by the Holy Spirit by transmitting the graces of Jesus won by His Cross and Resurrection to the Bishops, Priests, Deacons, and all the Faithful who are the Church.

The Apostles and the Church were enlightened through the coming of the Holy Spirit by receiving the grace to remember, preserve, and understand in its full meaning all that Christ taught and imparted to the Church.

The Apostles and the Church were strengthened by the coming of the Holy Spirit by receiving the grace to brave every danger, even death itself, in carrying out the preaching of the Gospel.

* The word *Apostle* means “one who is sent.”  The Apostles were “sent” by Christ.  “As the Father sent Me, so I have sent you.” (John 20:21).  Our Holy Father and our Bishops succeed St. Peter and the Twelve.  Our Pope and Bishops are the *Successors of the Apostles*.
* The word Gospel comes from the Greek *euangelion* (pronounced “*you-on-jail-lee-on*“) which means “Good News.”  The word “Gospel” is used to describe the “Good News” of the salvation that Christ offers to each and every person.  The word “Gospel” also denotes four important documents of the New Testament that present to us the words and actions of Our Lord Jesus Christ: the Gospel according to Matthew, the Gospel according to Mark, the Gospel according to Luke, and the Gospel according to John.

There were 12 Apostles.  The Apostles were sometimes also called “The Twelve.”  One of them, Judas Iscariot, betrayed the Lord Jesus and lost His place among the Twelve, and was replaced by a disciple name Matthias (St. Matthias’ Feast Day is May 14).  St. Paul is also considered an Apostle, but is not listed among the Twelve.

The names of the Twelve Apostles (and their Feast Days) are: Peter (February 22 and June 29), Andrew (November 30), James the Greater[son of Zebedee] (July 25), John [son of Zebedee] (December 27), Phillip (May 3), Bartholomew (August 24), Thomas (July 3), Matthew (September 21), James the Less (May 3), Jude Thaddeus (October 28), Simon (October 28), and Judas Iscariot.  Matthias (May 14) replaced Judas Iscariot.

St. Paul was also called an Apostle, but he wasn’t called by the Lord Jesus until after Christ died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven.  St. Paul was called the “Apostle of the Gentiles,” because his work was directed toward the conversion of Non-Jewish people.  He wrote many Letters – or Epistles – that form the New Testament.  The Feast Days of St. Paul are the Feast of his Conversion (January 25) and the Solemnity he shares with St. Peter on June 29 – which commemorates the Martyrdom of these two men in Rome between 64 – 68 A.D.

The Apostles failed to grasp fully the message of the Lord Jesus while he was still on earth because:

1. The Apostles needed the Holy Spirit to enlighten their minds
2. In preparing to be Apostles, they still lacked the necessary experience
3. Their minds were filled with earthly thoughts and desires that needed to be removed by the Gift of the Holy Spirit and knowledge of who Jesus really was

The Holy Spirit will remain with the Church forever, and will guide it in the ways of holiness and truth.By knowing this, we can be certain that the Church will never teach us falsehood, go astray, or be destroyed by the enemies of our faith.

Through the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the Apostles were given the gift of fearless preaching and “the gift of tongues.”

The “gift of tongues” is a spiritual (charismatic) gift that enables a believer to speak to God in a language other than his or her own.  Tongues first appeared as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost, when the Apostles began preaching the Gospel in a variety of different languages and dialects (Acts 2:4-11).  After that, the Acts of the Apostles regularly associates the gift of tongues with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon those who came to believe (Acts 10:44-46).

The gift of speaking in tongues at Pentecost when the Spirit first descended upon the Apostles is a sign that the Christian message is a universal message to be preached to all nations (Mark 16:15-17).  The people of various language groups and dialects were able to understand the Apostles, because the disunity and fragmentation of humanity that occurred at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) was corrected by the sending of the Holy Spirit, Who fashions from the many languages of humanity one voice to profess One Faith:

“…You bestowed the Holy Spirit today on those You made Your adopted children by uniting them to Your Only Begotten Son.  This same Spirit, as the Church came to birth, opened to all peoples the knowledge of God and brought together the many languages of the earth in profession of one Faith” (Preface for the Feast of Pentecost).

1. **What is Pentecost?**
2. **On what day did the Holy Spirit descend on the Apostles?**
3. **How does the Catholic Church commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost?**
4. **What does Pentecost say to those who claim that they believe in God, but they don’t see the Church as a necessary part of God’s plan to save them or any of us?**
5. **How did Pentecost get its name?**
6. **How did the Holy Spirit make His Presence known when He descended upon the Apostles and the other disciples at Pentecost?**
7. **Was there any symbolic meaning to the manifestation of the wind and the tongues of fire?**
8. **Did the Apostles know that the Holy Spirit would descend upon them?**
9. **What is “the sin against the Holy Spirit” that can never be forgiven, either in this world or the next?**
10. **Why did Christ send the Holy Spirit to His Church at Pentecost?**
11. **How was the Church sanctified or made holy through the coming of the Holy Spirit?**
12. **How were the Apostles and the Church enlightened by the coming of the Holy Spirit?**
13. **How were the Apostles and the Church strengthened by the coming of the Holy Spirit?**
14. **How many Apostles were there?**
15. **What are the names of the Twelve Apostles?**
16. **Who was St. Paul?**
17. **Why did the Apostles not fully understand the message of the Lord Jesus while He was still on earth?**
18. **Will the Holy Spirit remain with the Church forever?**
19. **What good is there in knowing that the Holy Spirit will remain with the Church forever and guide it in the ways of holiness and truth?**
20. **What visible manifestation or power was given to the Apostles by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost?**
21. **What is “the gift of tongues”?**
22. **Why was this gift given at the beginning of the Church at Pentecost?**