

## Week of Ascension

### From the Rector

#### What is Pentecost and why does it matter?



On June 4, Christians around the world will celebrate Pentecost, also known as Whitsunday. This is the third most important Christian holy day, after Easter and Christmas of course. The day is considered the birthday of the Church, because the Holy Spirit came upon a great number of people who became the founders of Christianity.

The word “Pentecost” comes from the Greek, meaning 50, and it follows 50 days of the Easter season, counting Easter Day itself. Pentecost is also a Jewish holiday, which was being celebrated by the Apostles and others when “suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush

of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” (Acts 2:1-4)

At Church of the Resurrection the altar and priest are decked in red to commemorate the “tongues of fire” that descended upon the Apostles and other followers of Jesus. As well, the congregation is encouraged to wear red. Unlike the Apostles though, we’re unlikely to begin speaking in tongues. Well, not all of us anyway....

#### **The Central Role of the Church in God’s Work in the World ( From Mark D. Roberts and Patheos.com**

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on individual followers of Jesus as they were gathered together in Jerusalem. This gathering became the first Christian church. New believers in Jesus were baptized as they joined this church. They, along with the first followers of Jesus, shared life together, focusing on teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. They shared their belongings so that no one was hungry or needy. As these first Christians lived out their new faith together, “the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Thus we speak of Pentecost as the birthday of the church.

In theory, the Spirit could have been poured out on the followers of Jesus when they were not gathered together. There are surely times when the Holy Spirit touches an individual who is alone in prayer, worship, or ministry to others. But the fact that the Spirit was given to a gathering of believers is not incidental. It underscores the centrality of the church in God’s work in the world. The actions of the earliest Christians put all of this in boldface. The Holy Spirit is not only given to individuals, but also, in a sense to the gathered people of God. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 3, the

Apostle Paul observes that the church is God's temple and that the Spirit dwells in the midst of the church (3:16-17; in 1 Cor 6:19-20 we find a complementary emphasis on the dwelling of the Spirit in individual Christians). Many Christians, especially those of us who have been influenced by the individualism of American culture, live as if the church is useful but unnecessary. We seem to believe that as long as we have a personal relationship with God, everything else is secondary. But Pentecost is a vivid illustration of the truth that is found throughout Scripture: the community of God's people is central to God's work in the world. Thus, Pentecost invites us to consider our own participation in the fellowship, worship, and mission of the church. It is a time to renew our commitment to live as an essential member of the body of Christ, using our gifts to build the church and share the love and justice of Christ with the world.

Please read Fr. Mark's whole discussion about Pentecost at:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/what-is-pentecost-why-does-it-matter/>

Blessings! *Fr. David*