

Lesson 1

Day of Pentecost

The Holy Gospel: John 7:37–39

Jesus and His disciples were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths. This was the last of the three great annual festivals that attracted Jewish people from all over the world to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. The celebration hailed the completion of the harvest and lasted seven days—with an eighth day added to note the end of the period of festivals. Jewish families fashioned small shelters (booths) outside their homes and “lived” in them during the celebration, remembering their ancestors’ forty years of wanderings in the wilderness. In the temple, the feast was observed with a daily sacrifice of bullocks on the altar of burnt offering. Another daily ceremony involved a procession of priests going to the Pool of Siloam with a golden pitcher to bring water to the temple. The procession circled the altar and then the water and a pitcher of wine from the drink offering were poured into two large, perforated, flat bowls—and the water flowing out of the bowls symbolized the water that gushed out of a rock to ease the thirst of their ancestors in the desert. During the ceremony, the people sang Isaiah 12:3, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation,” and Psalm 118:25, “Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!”

It was probably in connection with this water ceremony that Jesus positioned Himself so He could be heard by the crowd and called out: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.”

1. What was the drinking that Jesus was inviting people to do? What would be the result of their drinking what Jesus was offering? When had Jesus referred to the gift of living water prior to this?

2. Why did Jesus back up His offer to the people with a reference to Scripture?

Jesus did not quote verbatim from an Old Testament passage but gave the general thrust of passages such as Isaiah 58:11 and Zechariah 14:8. Though the Spirit of God had been present and active among God’s people throughout Old Testament history, John interpreted Jesus’ words in terms of what happened later on the day we are remembering today, Pentecost.

3. How could John, in verse 39, say, “The Spirit had not been given”? What did he say had to happen before the Spirit could be given in the way he was recalling and to which he was pointing? What, then, is the essential difference between the Spirit’s activity in Old Testament times (also in the ministry of John the Baptist) and the Spirit’s activity on Pentecost and thereafter?

4. How are the rivers of living water that flow *from* Christians related to the water they *receive* when they “drink” of Jesus?

5. How does this living water flow from you to those around you?

The Old Testament Lesson: Numbers 11:24–30

The seventy elders “prophesied.” The *Concordia Self-Study Bible* explains, “The Hebrew verb here is not in the form in which it is usually found to express the mediation of a prophetic message through the Spirit. It probably means that they gave ecstatic expression to an intense religious experience” (p. 206). We are not told that Eldad and Medad opposed Moses’ call to meet at the tabernacle, though for some reason they didn’t come to the meeting. But when the Lord gave the Spirit who enabled Moses to the elders, the Spirit came also upon Eldad and Medad, who prophesied among the people in the camp.

6. What motivated Joshua’s suggestion that Moses put a stop to their prophesying? What does Moses’ response reveal about this great leader of God’s people?

7. What does this incident teach us for life in the Church today?

8. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Acts 2:1–21

Pentecost, a Jewish harvest festival, was celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover, which was the fifteenth day of the month of Nisan. As a result, it did not occur on the same day of the week each year. In the year of the great event that we remember today, AD 30, Pentecost occurred on a Saturday, a Sabbath Day. As the Early Church began to observe Pentecost, celebrating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it was observed on the fiftieth day after Easter, counting Easter as day one. Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox—making it a variable date, but always a Sunday. Pentecost is celebrated on a Sunday seven weeks later.

“There came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.” It helps to know that both the Hebrew word *ruach* and the Greek word *pneuma* conveyed the concept of “spirit” as well as the concepts of “air” and “wind.” Jesus also used the wind as an illustration of the Spirit’s “blowing” wherever He wishes.

9. What was God’s purpose in the sound like a violent wind on Pentecost?

10. Jesus had blessed His apostles with the Holy Spirit when He commissioned them to speak for Him as His representatives on Easter Sunday in the Upper Room. What was added by the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost?

11. What looked like “divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them” in token of what was taking place. Why fire? (See Luke 3:16.)

12. Who are the “each one of them” and the “they were all” upon whom this outpouring of the Holy Spirit came? (See Acts 1:12–15; 2:1.) What does it say about this group that they were all together in one place?

The sound like wind and the tongues like fire evidently were temporary signs of what was taking place. The crowd heard the sound and gathered, but there is no indication that the tongues like fire were seen by people other than those in the house. The manifestation of the Spirit that lasted longer and that touched the crowd was the newly enabled ability of these followers of Jesus to speak in tongues. The Greek for “tongues” is *glossais* and means “languages.” The experience evidently was a happy surprise.

13. What was God’s purpose in giving the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost? How did the Pentecost experience differ from later manifestations of this gift of tongues in places like Corinth? (See 1 Corinthians 14:1–4.)

Some of the “Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven” in Jerusalem at this time were pilgrims who had come for the festival days. Others were elderly Jews who had moved to Jerusalem to live their last years near the temple after having lived their whole lives in other countries. These foreign Jews probably could handle some Aramaic and Greek, but they were surprised and pleased when they suddenly found Galilean Jews declaring the wonders of God in their mother tongues.

14. How was the crowd divided about what they were witnessing and experiencing?

Peter used the skeptics’ “They are filled with new wine” as a springboard for his message, first making it clear that “these people are not drunk.” Jews of that time carried out morning sacrifices before the first meal, a meal of bread. They did not drink wine until the evening meal, a more complete meal when also some meat might be eaten. So Peter dismissed the idea of their being drunk at 9:00 a.m. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he quoted the prophecy of Joel to explain what was happening. It was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was predicted in their sacred Scripture as part of God’s plan that “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Having gained the full attention of the crowd by quoting Joel’s prophecy to explain what was happening, Peter went on to proclaim Jesus as the Christ to his eager listeners. Sample key Christ-centered sentences in Peter’s Pentecost message: Acts 2:22–23, 32, 36, 38–39.

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O God, on this day You once taught the hearts of Your faithful people by sending them the light of Your Holy Spirit. Grant us in our day by the same Spirit to have a right understanding in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy consolation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: John 7:37–39

1. Jesus' "Whoever believes in Me"—a phrase used in some form forty-one times in John's Gospel—makes it clear that the drinking He was inviting people to do is faith in Him as the Promised One. The Greek uses present imperatives, *erchestho*, "come," and *pineto*, "drink," which imply continuing action. We do get new life from Jesus the very first time we drink of Him by faith, but the coming and drinking surely are to continue throughout life as we live with Him in a daily relationship of faith and love. The result of this drinking is that "rivers of living water" would, in turn, flow from them to others. Prior to this, Jesus had spoken of giving living water to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. (See John 4:4–14.)

2. Jesus used Old Testament Scripture to show He was not offering something new or strange, but was Himself the fulfillment of God's ancient covenant promise. The Old Testament had already used the picture of water to describe God's refreshing His people and their becoming a source of refreshment to others as they testified of His love.

3. John interpreted Jesus' words as referring to the Pentecost gift of the Holy Spirit, who enabled the message of the apostles. The Spirit had not been given in the same fullness of impact in Old Testament times through prophetic utterances as He was given by Jesus after completing His saving work. John said Jesus had to be "glorified"—through His obedient death, His victorious resurrection, and His exalting ascension—before the Spirit would come. The Old Testament prophets, including John the Baptist, pointed ahead in the power of the Spirit to the Promised One. The Spirit, who filled the apostles at Pentecost and would dwell in all who would come to Jesus and drink, proclaimed to them and through them the assuring message of a salvation that was completed once for all in Christ.

4. The Spirit's activity through Christians (rivers of living water) always relates people to the Good News of salvation in Jesus—the same living water that continually refreshes their own spirits. All of this is the Holy Spirit carrying out His life-renewing work! (See John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26–27; 16:5–15.)

5. The testimonies of faith and praise and service that flow from Christians are the means the Spirit uses to touch the hearts of others. Evangelism studies show that almost 90 percent of new Christians have found their way to Christ and the Church through the influence of friends and families, not through preachers and evangelists. Christ commissions all of us to the ministry of reconciliation! (See 2 Corinthians 5:18–21.) Ask your group to suggest practical ways in which they can let the living water flow to the world in its need.

The Old Testament Lesson: Numbers 11:24–30

6. As Moses himself indicated, it was probably jealousy for his master's position as the Lord's prophet to Israel that led Joshua to urge Moses to stop Eldad and Medad. Moses was not so concerned about a threat to his leadership. He knew who he was and that his authority rested squarely on the Lord's call. Instead of being insecure, he welcomed this evidence of the Lord's moving to help His people.

7. This incident teaches us that while the Lord does have individuals whom He has called and enabled for leadership, their ultimate purpose is to equip all of God's people for ministry in the power of the Spirit. (See Ephesians 4:11–16.) Sometimes powerful ministering arises in the Church from unlikely sources as the Spirit's gifts are given "to each one individually as He wills." (See 1 Corinthians 12:1–11.) We need to be open to the Lord's surprises.

8. Eldad's and Medad's receiving the Spirit along with the seventy elders says that the living water that Jesus offers is for any and all. It flows where God wills it to flow.

The Epistle for the Day: Acts 2:1–21

The Book of Acts is more a historical account than a letter, although it was written as a letter to Theophilus. It sometimes provides the Church with the Epistle for the Day—as well as being used occasionally instead of the Old Testament as the First Lesson.

9. The sound like a wind no doubt gave Jesus' gathered followers a clue to what was taking place, but it also attracted a crowd of people who heard it and were curious about what was happening.

10. The gift of the Spirit in the Upper Room on Easter Sunday was to enable them to believe the resurrection of Jesus and understand how it fit into God's saving plan. The outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost enabled them to be bold witnesses and empowered their witness to have impact on those who heard. It signaled a change in thrust. They were no longer watching the Lord carry out His saving mission; now they would be carrying out their mission in His name and by His power. It was the beginning of a new dimension in Jesus' ministry as He would now work through His faithful followers.

11. John the Baptist had pointed to the Greater One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Fire is a symbol of energy or power, able to warm or consume. We still use the flame of fire as a symbol of the Holy Spirit and His work.

12. Acts 1 lists the apostles and the women and speaks of 120 followers of Jesus in Jerusalem. It is not out of the question to think that all of these received the outpouring of the Spirit and praised God and declared His wonders in languages they had not known. This surely appears to be the thrust of the experience as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. That they were all together in the house indicates that they trusted Jesus' promise and were expectantly and prayerfully waiting for the gift the Father promised.

13. On the day of Pentecost, the gift of tongues was given for the purpose of communicating the Good News of Jesus in the mother tongues of the foreign Jews in Jerusalem. Its purpose was to call the attention of Jews from every nation to the Good News of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, as Savior and Lord! On Pentecost, Galilean Jews, who were generally considered to be country hicks, said things that spoke right to the hearts of those who heard because they were speaking the languages they had known from childhood, the languages they thought in. Later manifestations of the gift of tongues in places such as Corinth involved a more ecstatic, unintelligible speech. This edified the tongues-speaker by evidencing the Spirit's presence, but it did little for others, for they could not understand what was being said. Read all of Paul's apostolic instructions about tongues-speaking, which had been used divisively in Corinth—1 Corinthians 12–14.

14. Many in the crowd who heard the followers of Jesus speaking in this variety of languages were amazed and perplexed, but their curiosity and interest were deepened. "What does this mean?" they asked—and the Spirit had them ready to listen to Peter's explanation. As is usually the case, there were also those in Jerusalem on that day who had to make a joke of everything. They made fun of the tongues-speakers, saying, "They are filled with new wine."

Peter had to address such charges, and probably welcomed them, because he used them as an introduction and scriptural base for what he really wanted to tell the crowd. Notice that once he explained what was happening and backed it up with Scripture, he eagerly moved to the message about Jesus' resurrection, the message that makes all the difference in the world in any proclamation about Jesus as Savior and Lord. It is never enough to talk just about Jesus' life and His death on a cross. We are to witness to the living Lord, who comes in the power of the Holy Spirit to confront us and all around us with our need for Him and with the wonderful way in which He fills our need.

The message and effect of Pentecost then and now is that our daily lives may be lived *in Him* because He comes to live *in us!*