

The disciples probably thought they'd be killed next after Jesus ascended. Jesus had said, "Follow me," and that meant all the way. After the resurrection Jesus appeared to them, and that made them feel better, but now he was gone - really gone. And they were worried.

They should have remembered that Jesus promised to send the Spirit. They should have believed that promise. But when you're afraid, it's easy to stop remembering and to stop believing. On Pentecost all their worries ended.

At the time of Christ, Pentecost was already on the Jewish calendar. It was also called the Feast of Weeks, and Jews from all over made pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate it. The Feast of Weeks started as a springtime sacrifice of newborn lambs and of the first fruits from crops. Later it commemorated God giving the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. You remember that story. The Israelites had fled slavery in Egypt on the first Passover, and had crossed the Red Sea and wandered in the desert. Several weeks later, Moses climbed Mt. Sinai and experienced the power of God. He heard peals of thunder and a loud trumpet blast. A heavy cloud came over the mountain and God descended there in fire, handing Moses the divine law.

Now on another Pentecost, the disciples gathered not on a mountain but in an upper room. They heard not thunder and trumpets but a sound like a strong wind. The Holy Spirit descended upon them in tongues as of fire. Instead of the law, they received the Holy Spirit, and they told of God's marvelous deeds to all the nations.

My brothers and sisters there are times when we are afraid, when we fear Jesus has gone, when we do not remember the promises he made or believe that they are true. The church gives us Pentecost Sunday each year to help us remember and to help us believe. Many fears threaten our inner peace: terrorism from other nations, illnesses like SARS and the West Nile Virus, lawsuits from people we offend, or the loss of someone we love. There's plenty to be afraid of; sometimes the nightly news is scarier than any horror film. But God has given us the Spirit. We receive that Spirit at baptism and at confirmation and in every communion we share. The Holy Spirit enables us to put our fears away and to speak aloud of the mighty acts of God.