

Gifts of the Holy Spirit are at hand

MULTIPLE CHOICE for Pentecost Sunday: The Bible describes God sending the Holy Spirit upon the disciples: (a) 50 days after the resurrection; (b) the same day as the resurrection; (c) centuries before the resurrection; (d) all of the above.

We're tempted to mark letter "a". After all, "Pentecost" means "50 days." The story which leaps to our minds on this feast gathers the disciples together for the sudden sound of wind and the bright appearance of tongues of fire (Acts 2:1-11).

However, a better answer is "d" — all of the above. Since the traditional Pentecost story comes from Acts of the Apostles, it serves as our first reading for the feast.

But next Sunday's Gospel reports that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on the day of the resurrection (John 20:19-23). And several passages from the Old Testament foreshadow the whole experience.

ALTHOUGH you may not hear them next week, several passages from the Old Testament may accompany the Mass of Pentecost. Pentecost actually carries a vigil Mass similar in many respects to the Easter Vigil. At Easter we may choose from seven Old Testament Scriptures at the solemn vigil. That liturgy includes the baptism of new members before we all share the Easter Eucharist. The Vigil Mass for Pentecost offers four scriptures from the Old Testament and provides an alternate occasion for celebrating baptism.

Those scriptures richly expand on the themes of this feast. Two of them prophesy the coming of the Spirit onto God's people. Ezekiel (37:1-14) imagines a field of dry bones coming to life with the breath of God. Joel (3:1-5) foretells the pouring out of the Spirit on all the world in a passage quoted extensively by St. Peter in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:17-21). A passage from Exodus (Ex 19:3-

8a, 16-20b) describes the coming of God to Moses in loud noise and bright fire 50 days after the celebration of Passover. And Genesis (11:1-9) tells how the tower of Babel destroyed the original unity of creation by creating the various human languages. So the coming of the Holy Spirit after the resurrection fulfilled the prophecies, imitated the appearance of God to Moses, and restored the linguistic unity broken by the sin of Babel.

On Pentecost Sunday, we usually omit those scriptures at Mass in favor of hearing the more familiar story from Acts, but they deserve some study.

ST. JOHN does not record Pentecost in the same way Luke does in Acts. Instead, he reports that Jesus appears to his faithful followers on the evening of the resurrection and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." This reading lies behind the famous story of the doubting St. Thomas. We don't know where he was — visiting the sick, asleep at home or playing at the boats. But Thomas missed out on the event recorded here and demanded proof before he'd believe in Jesus.

The passage begins with a description of Jesus' ability to walk through locked doors and calm the fears of his disciples. He shows the wounds of his hands and side, proof that he is the same one so brutally put to death. Then sends them forth: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He gives them the greatest gift of all: "Receive the Holy Spirit." Why? "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them." As the disciples go out on their mission, they forgive the sins of those who seek to join them. Their mission is that of the Holy Spirit — the restoration of unity.

So, when does the Bible describe the coming of the Spirit? Luke places it 50 days after Easter. John places it on Easter day. The Old Testament prophecies tell about it hundreds of years in advance. And we celebrate that coming of the Spirit in a special way, year after year, on one of the greatest feasts we have — Pentecost.

Multiple are the gifts of the Spirit. Multiple are our choices in using them. □

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Fr. Paul Turner



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Daily Scripture Readings

Seventh Sunday of Easter Sunday, May 19

Acts 1:12-14
Psalms 27:1, 4, 7-9
1 Peter 4:13-16
John 17:1-11a

Monday, May 20

Acts 19:1-8
Psalms 68:2-7
John 16:29-33

Tuesday, May 21

Acts 20:17-27
Psalms 68:10-11, 20-21
John 17:1-11a

Wednesday, May 22

Acts 20:28-38
Psalms 68:29-30, 33-36
John 17:11b-19

Thursday, May 23

Acts 22:30; 23:6-11
Psalms 16:1-2, 5, 7-11
John 17:20-26

Friday, May 24

Acts 25:13b-21
Psalms 103:1-2; 11-12,
19-20
John 21:15-19

Saturday, May 25

Acts 28:16-20, 30-31
Psalms 11:4-5, 7
John 21:20-25

Pentecost Vigil

Saturday, May 25
Genesis 11:1-9
Psalms 104:1-2, 24,
27-30, 35
Romans 8:22-27
John 7:37-39



Pentecost Sunday Sunday, May 26

Acts 2:1-11
Psalms 104:1, 24, 29-31, 34
1 Corinthians 12:3b-7,
12-13
John 20:19-23