

Alleluia! Christ is risen and ascended!

Today marks the end of the 50-day Easter season.

But as with all the graduation and commencement ceremonies being held in schools and colleges, it is not simply an end, but also a beginning.

It is a transition.

For the church, it is a transition

from life with Jesus as he was bound to time and space,
to life with Jesus present in all times and all places.

It is a transition

from the bodily presence of Jesus outside of the individual disciples
to the bodily presence of Jesus inside them.

It is a transition from being students of God's Word

to being proclaimers and teachers of the Gospel.

Pentecost, as that 50-day mark is called, is the transition from the apostles looking at their Jewish rabbi and teacher to see Jesus

to them looking at their relatedness with one another to see Jesus.

As Jesus says:

¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

The extraordinary events of that Day of Pentecost 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead are the beginning of the Spirit giving life to the Church as the living Body of Christ.

That experience was a divine intervention in the affairs of the world, such that it could only be described as being “like” familiar things.

- A great deafening sound – like the rush of wind.
- Divided tongues – that looked like tongues of fire.

We do not know exactly what these experiences were, but we don’t have to.

It is enough to know what they accomplished.

4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit of God the Father that was in Jesus, that animated his life and deeds and teaching --was now in them – just as Jesus had promised.

They were now possessed, if you will, of the presence of God,

- the active will of God,
- the life of God,
- the power and energy of God.

The Holy Spirit in those apostles was the opposite of the unclean spirits that possess the demoniac in the cemetery and the man in the synagogue and the religious leader’s son.

Those spirits caused illness and destruction of human life and dignity.

- Such unclean spirits cause people to shoot students in a classroom
- or to seek the destruction of Black and brown people,
- or to terminate human life in the womb.

I am not saying that people who do these things are inherently evil, -- only God can judge that -- but that an unclean spirit leads them to such actions.

It is precisely to overturn the power of these unclean spirits that Jesus died and rose from the dead.

The Holy Spirit by which he was conceived of the Virgin Mary and lived and performed acts of healing and life,

now enters the apostles as breathed from him and the Father.

They are now possessed of God in their very bodies and souls.

⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

And in those other languages, those who were gathered for a great festival heard the message of Jesus risen from the dead to forgive sinners.

Whatever it was that those apostles experienced on that Day of Pentecost, this is what God was accomplishing through it:

That everyone – from the farthest reaches of the known world – could hear and understand the news of Jesus risen from the dead and turn to him in faith.

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From its very conception, the church has been sent into the world with the message of Jesus.

The message of life that is more powerful than death;

The forgiveness that sets sinners free;

The grace that transforms lives from being possessed of unclean spirits to being possessed of the Holy Spirit.

And being possessed of the Holy Spirit, we are sent out doing the works of God in relation to others.

This is true not only for the church as a whole, but for each individual Christian.

We may never experience the loud noise or tongues that were present on that first Pentecost, or have a dramatic conversion.

But each person who is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

receives the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands and prayer and is sealed with the sign of the Cross.

By God's Word and action, the Holy Spirit dwells in us.

The Holy Spirit in each of us – and in all of us together – spurs us to action as the presence of God in our world.

How the Holy Spirit works in each of us takes many different forms.

For Mary, for example, it was the ordinary process of carrying a child in her womb for 9 months, giving birth to Jesus, and raising him as a person of faith.

For someone like Mother Teresa, it was the persistent care for the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, India.

For some, it may be working for social justice and for others writing devotional books.

For some, it may be doing honest work with integrity and for others, it may be showing generosity in supporting others working for peace.

The Holy Spirit calls some to church vocations as pastors, teachers, deacons and evangelists

and others to lay leadership as youth workers, Sunday School teachers, committee members and administrators.

No vocation is better or holier or more important than another – **the Holy Spirit uses all of us and each of us to accomplish God's desire to save humanity from sin.**

The miracle of Pentecost is not the loud noise or visible manifestation of the Spirit – **it is the spreading of the message of Jesus as the mission of the church.**

Right now, our world needs this message.

Our world needs to know that Jesus gives life where we see no options.

Our world needs to know that Jesus lives to free us from the need to control others.

Our world needs to know that violence did not triumph over Jesus and cannot have power in our lives.

Our world needs to know that Jesus lives to love and forgive all who turn to him – no exceptions.

The Holy Spirit gives us ability to use words and actions:

- Speaking and writing,
- voting,
- demonstrating,
- comforting,
- praying
- and worshiping to spread the good news:

Jesus lives, now and forever.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen