

The Lord be with you.

It's Pentecost!

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.

If we live in the Spirit, let us walk in the Spirit.

Let us confess our sins to God our Father

Heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault;

by what we have done and by what we have failed to do.

We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ who died for us, forgive us all that is past; and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name. *Amen*

Absolution Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy on you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and keep you in eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Acts 2:1-21 [The Coming of the Holy Spirit]

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And 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.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the

morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

“In the last days it will be, God declares,

that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,

and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

and your young men shall see visions,

and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women,

in those days I will pour out my Spirit;

and they shall prophesy.

And I will show portents in the heaven above

and signs on the earth below,

blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

This is the word of the Lord;

Thanks be to God.

John 20:19-23 [Jesus Appears to the Disciples]

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

And now I pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable to you, Lord; my strength and my redeemer, Amen.

This Sunday, the feast of [Pentecost or Whitsun](#), in the Christian liturgical year, is observed. Its now seven weeks after Easter Day. Today marks the Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles fifty days after Easter. This is no small festival – it is the second most important festival of the church, outranked only by Easter Day.

But these two words need a bit of picking apart before they make real sense to us as Christians.

Yes, we Christians use it to commemorate the sending of the Holy Spirit on the disciples: we've just heard those words. They are clear; they're uplifting; they help us to understand the Holy Spirit: part of the Trinity.

So why use these two words, Whitsun and Pentecost? because neither has anything to do with Christianity! Absolutely nothing!

So: Whitsun, or more correctly, White Sunday. In England it took on some characteristics of [Beltane](#), which originated from the pagan celebration of Summer's Day, the beginning of the summer half-year in Europe. The same as Bealtaine here in Ireland. It was and sometimes still is, a pagan festival. An agricultural festival.

In England again, **Whitsuntide**, the week following Whitsunday, was one of three vacation weeks – holiday weeks - for the medieval [villein or indentured servant](#); on most manors he was free from service on the lord's [demesne](#) this week, which marked a pause in the agricultural year. Again, agricultural.

Nothing to do with Church or Christianity!

Look now at our alternative name for today – Pentecost. That's a Greek word, which means simply a fifty-day period. From what? Well, we see it as fifty days from Easter Day. But why?

Where does it come from? Well, it is Jewish. But it is or was an agricultural festival. Palestine was primarily marked by the seasons of planting and harvest of the fruit of the earth. And their festivals reflected those times.

So Pentecost was fundamentally a harvest festival. This Jewish festival wasn't fixed; it was timed to be seven weeks after the first early sampling of the barley crop. Jews still mark it as the “Festival of Weeks”.

So seven weeks after that marked the end of the barley harvest and also the offering of the first fruits – the first early sampling of the wheat harvest. Pat and I saw that visibly, clearly, a few years ago in Northern Spain walking the Camino: the barley fields were ripe: ready to be cut; but the wheat crop was only just beginning to swell.

Note that the time between the early barley harvest and the early wheat harvest was seven weeks. 7 days X 7 weeks gives us 49 days; hence fifty days – the Greek Pentecost. And it has been taken over by us Christians as fifty days from Easter.

End of history lesson! Both of the words we use for today began as agricultural festivals. But later, both were taken over by Judaism and Christianity to suit their own religious ends.

Judaism began to mark Pentecost as a feast which they called Shavuot, marking the gift of the Torah – the first five Hebrew books of the Bible – the Law books – God's grace to Israel in giving them a path to follow.

What we have heard from the Acts in the story of the pilgrims in Jerusalem is hugely symbolic of the universality of the message of the new Christianity – that it can be understood by everyone – no matter what their language.

These Jewish pilgrims present in Jerusalem had travelled from all over the Roman Empire for the Festival of Weeks. Take a look at a biblical atlas if you aren't sure of the spread of that Empire. What astounded them was not merely that they could understand what was being said, but that they all followed the same God.

Just as important for us Christians is that Pentecost proclaims the universality of our Christian faith. That it is catholic – which of course just means “universal”. That it is for everyone. Not just for the initiated, as it was in Judaism. You don't have to undergo initiation rites – you just have to believe.

As John's Gospel tells us: “These signs are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

And today our Gospel reading binds up the logic of trinitarian belief just as straightforwardly: “Jesus said to the disciples, peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit”. “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

So, we are God's agents; his new disciples. We are his fellow workers. And our helper is his spiritual presence – the Holy Spirit. It is all round us. We believe that he dwells in us; that we invite him into us at baptism.

I hope you see something of the significance of this festival of Pentecost; this second-most-important Christian festival of the Church year.

Maybe we should just down-play Christmas and leave it to the commercialists, or let it revert to what it used to be, just a mid-winter binge-fest. Maybe we could use today instead for the exchange of gifts.

Because it seems to me to be much more meaningful than the miasma of Christmas. That we have the promise that the Holy Spirit dwells within us, to help us throughout our lives. That is the very centre of our belief: our Christian hope.

Please think of our nine confirmation candidates in that vein. They have not yet made their formal commitment to God as adults, repeating the promises that their parents and godparents made on their behalf.

Pray for Benjamin, Zoe, Rian, Mathilde, Garret, Jack, Gyles, Beth and Charlie; not just today, but regularly and frequently.

Why? Because, well, they're worth it! Like us, they are children of God. Precious and unique witnesses and workers for God. And they are our future in this church community. Thank the Lord for them. Amen.

These weeks of the Easter season have been, to me, an extended exploration of our Christian belief – our creed. And it all comes from the Bible – from nowhere else. So let us now declare that creed: “I believe ...”

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord.

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried;

he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again;

he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,

and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church,

the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

Intercessions, beginning with the Collect of the Day of Pentecost

Almighty God,

who on the day of Pentecost sent your Son to the apostles

with the wind from heaven and in tongues of flame,

filling them with joy and boldness to preach the gospel:

By the power of the same Spirit strengthen us to witness to your truth

and to draw everyone to the fire of your love;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Lord God, guide the Church, blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, to preach the gospel to all nations. Give to your people words of power, words of comfort, words of life. Bless your ministers and all who preach the Way.

God who has spoken to the world, to be heard and praised in many tongues, speak now to a world troubled by many divisions and failures to understand.

Break down the barriers that hold people apart, so that your wonderful works can be known.

May we be granted a share in the gifts of the Spirit bestowed on the apostles, to guide us in sharing the good news with our families and neighbours and all whose lives touch our own. Inspire us with the breath of life and the fire of love.

Have mercy on all whose lives are limited by poverty, suffering or ignorance; all those who are sick and frightened by this COVID virus. May the Holy Spirit come to them, to be their Comforter and lead them into light and peace.

We pray for those whose lives were led by the Spirit of God, and who now rejoice where human tongues have ceased, to praise him in the harmony of heaven. May we too be led to that glorious life.

Christ, who breathes upon us the Spirit of life, receive our prayers. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever, Amen.

Dismissal: The Spirit of truth lead you into all truth,
give you grace to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
and to proclaim the words and works of God:
And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father,
the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with you and remain with you always.
Amen.