

Notes for Next Sunday

Pentecost Sunday

The Point of this Week's Readings

Pentecost was a Jewish festival day celebrating the gifts of God. The word Pentecost literally means “fiftieth,” and the festival fell annually on the fiftieth day after Passover. Pentecost is also referred to in the Old Testament as the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Ingathering (Ex 34:22; Num. 28:26–31). At this time of the year, between Passover and Pentecost, the wheat harvest was coming in. Thus the Feast of Ingathering (Pentecost) was like a Thanksgiving Day in the United States and likewise lasted one day. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 17, Part 2)

First Reading (Genesis 11:1-9). The children of Noah’s three sons began to multiply after the Flood. At some point they began to realize how numerous they were and the power that afforded them. It was at this point that they decided to build “*a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may make a name for our selves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.*” (v. 4). Their pride led them to attempt doing just the opposite that was the Lord’s will. The Lord will always gets the last word when humans seek to not follow His decrees. He did here too by confusing their language. They could not understand each other and hence continue their work on the tower (Babel). They wound up being “*scattered over the face of the whole earth*” like God intended.

Second Reading (Acts 2:1-21). On the Day of Pentecost tongues of fire were on the heads of the disciples. This reading also points to the Holy Spirit enabling them to speak in many languages matching the various peoples who had come from regions outside of the Jerusalem area. These many languages allowed them to hear “*the wonders of God in our own languages.*” (v. 11). In faith they ask “*what does this mean?*” (v. 12). There are always sceptics and they were present here too suggesting that the men were drunk (v. 13). Peter stands up and gives a powerful answer to the doubters. He points out that people did not have anything to eat or drink before 10:00 on festival days and the time was only 9:00. He then goes on using the Book of Joel to explain the events that are taking place.

Gospel (John 14:23-31). In this reading Jesus is telling His disciples about coming of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost). Jesus is doing this out of love so they will have less fear knowing what is on the horizon for them. He also points out that He is doing this so that they will believe. We, also, have his Word and it not only allows us to believe but drive out all fear.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

FIRST READING – Genesis 11:1-9

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ² As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. ³ They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” ⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. ⁶ The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” ⁸ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

11:2 men moved eastward. Here we see the Shemites, the line which had received Noah's special blessing, rebelling against God's expressed will for them. After Noah's family left the ark God has commanded them: "Fill the earth!" It was God's good will that in time the whole earth should be filled with people who would live for His glory, so that from east to west His reputation as Savior would be magnified. (PBC)

Noah's descendants started out well. From Armenia, where the ark had come to rest, they journeyed down into the Tigris-Euphrates valley, often referred to as Mesopotamia (present day Iraq). The direction of their migration was to the southeast; here it's described as "eastward," because the Hebrew language has expressions only for the four points of the compass; it has none for the oblique directions. (PBC)

Until now, all events have been consistently identified with "the east." Now, Noah's early descendants journeyed down the Tigris-Euphrates Valley of Mesopotamia. (TLSB)

11:2 plain of Shinar. A well-watered plain would naturally look good to farmers and, in disobedience to God, they decided to stop their migration and settle down. (PBC)

11:3 brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Stone and mortar were used as building materials in Canaan. Stone was scarce in Mesopotamia, however, so mud brick and tar were used (as indicated by archaeological excavations). (CSB)

11:4 tower. The typical Mesopotamian temple-tower, known as a ziggurat, was square at the base and had sloping, stepped sides that led upward to a small shrine at the top. (CSB)

SECOND READING – Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. ⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

2:1-21 This text fulfills Jesus' Acts 1:5 promise that the believers would be given the gift and Baptism of the Holy Spirit. In obedience to Jesus' request, the disciples stayed in Jerusalem at their physical peril, for after Jesus' crucifixion, the enemies of Christ in the Sanhedrin were still dangerous to the followers of the Savior. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 17, Part 2)

2:1 in one place. Evidently not the upstairs room where they were staying (1:13) but perhaps some place in the temple precincts, for the apostles were "continually at the temple" when it was open. (CSB)

2:2 violent wind. Breath or wind is a symbol of the Spirit of God. (CSB)

2:3 fire. A symbol of the divine presence, it was also associated with judgment (see Mt 3:12). (CSB)

2:3 These fire-like tongues are plainly a fulfillment of the prophecy that John the Baptist had made – that the Messiah would baptize His followers with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matthew 3:11) – and are a clear symbol of the divine presence of the Holy Spirit. (LL)

2:5 *God-fearing Jews*. Jews dispersed throughout the world who piously observed the Law, now in Jerusalem to observe the required feasts. (TLSB)

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17” “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. 19 I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

2:17–18 *all people ... sons ... daughters ... young men ... old men ... men ... women*. The Spirit is bestowed on all, irrespective of sex, age and rank. (CSB)

2:17 *last days*. Refers to the time after God sent his Son and his Son completed his redeeming work. (PBC)

2:20 *day of the Lord*. When Christ returns in glory. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – John 14:23-31

23 Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. 25 “All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. 28 “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. 29 I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. 30 I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, 31 but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. “Come now; let us leave.

14:26 *remind you of everything I have said to you*. This is vital because of our sinfulness we readily forget his Word and drift. It shows how well he knows us and how he will take care of our weaknesses.

14:27 *I do not give ... as the world gives*. The best the world can do is an attempt to stop wars. This is spiritual and the world spiritually hates Christ.

14:30 *prince of this world has no hold on me*. Against Christ, Satan is powerless. (TLSB)