

## SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

### Pentecost commonly called Whitsunday<sup>i</sup>

#### Lessons:

**The First Lesson:**<sup>ii</sup> Here beginneth the twenty-eighth Verse of the second Chapter of Joel.<sup>iii</sup>

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew [SHOW] wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:**<sup>iv</sup> Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>v</sup>

“When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites [EE-lumb-ights], and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia [kappa-

**DOE-she-uh]**, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia [**FRIDGE-ee-uh]**, and Pamphylia [**pam-FILL-ee-uh]**, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene [**sigh-REE-knee]**, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Homily:**

Fifty days after the real Passover, when, after dying for the sins of the whole world, Christ rose from the dead, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in Jerusalem. The crowd saw the tongues of fire and heard the rushing mighty wind. They heard the disciples declare the works of God—Christ’s miracles and especially His resurrection—in the native languages of people who had come from all over the empire. The event was real and it was supernatural. Saint Peter (no longer afraid, no longer denying the Lord) declared the Gospel. Through his preaching, about three thousand people were converted.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, with His power and His gifts, is every bit as real as the Incarnation, though very different in kind. Through the Incarnation God was present in the earth in the Person of His Son, without any sin, without any taint of original sin. Through the coming of the Holy Spirit God is present in the earth through sinners who are called to become—every one of them—saints. In the Incarnation God was present in His Son to go about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil; through the coming of the Holy Spirit, Christ is present in His Church to continue this very ministry.

Through the Incarnation Christ was present in a body of flesh and blood. Through the coming of the Holy Spirit, Christ is present in His Body, the Church, of which you are the members, the parts. In us, by the Holy Spirit, Christ remains a tangible, physical and visible reality. His Incarnation is extended through His Body the Church. Where we gather together He is present.

Upon what do we depend? Is it enough to have good plans, and useful ideas? These are good things, but they are not enough. If the disciples had depended upon a brilliant plan, a sure-fire market strategy to build the Church, we would not even remember their names. The Church suddenly became a powerful reality in the world on the day of Pentecost, and that for one reason: The Holy Spirit had come *in power*. The Risen Lord Jesus had told them to do nothing, but simply to remain in the city until endued with power from on high. The Risen Lord Jesus Christ commanded them to take no action at all until then. So they waited and prayed during those ten days after the Lord ascended to the Father's right hand; and then the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, came upon them.

Christ, as touching His human body as Jesus of Nazareth, had stepped behind the veil when a cloud took Him out of their sight. Then, on the Day of Pentecost, the Church emerged as the Body of Christ in what we might call the second chapter of the Incarnation. God the Word (λόγος, *logos*) came into the world on the Day of the Annunciation, and showed Himself in His Nativity when He was born in Bethlehem. He walked the earth as a man, and “*went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.*”<sup>vi</sup>

He still goes about doing good and healing all who are oppressed of the devil, this time through the Church which is His Body. Make no mistake about it; when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, the Church became the Body of Christ just as truly as Christ had been born in Bethlehem. Our ministry as the Church is His ministry, as He extends His Incarnation through us, and goes about doing good, but not only as far as *one* man may travel. Now He goes into every place on earth, preaching the Gospel in all the world as a testimony to all nations, gathering out of all nations those who are His disciples. The Church, His bride and His Body, believes and does works greater in number, just as the disciple Elisha did twice the miracles of Elijah the prophet, when a double portion of the same Spirit rested on him.<sup>vii</sup>

On Pentecost, among the many people in Jerusalem who had come for the feast, were pilgrims from various nations, that is the God-fearers and proselytes who were born as Gentiles, and either had begun to convert to Judaism, or had fully converted. Also, there many Jews of

the Diaspora who lived most of the time in foreign countries. Although just about everyone in the Roman Empire spoke enough Greek to get by, as it was the international language, these pilgrims heard the disciples speaking in the languages of their own distant homelands.

Anyone with genuine experience of such things knows fully well that this was not something uncontrollable, not the result of a trance or ecstasy, and certainly not emotionalism; the speaking was subject fully to the self-control of each one who spoke in these other tongues; but the words themselves were known only to those foreigners who heard the word of God each in his own native tongue.

*“Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, where in we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome. Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.”*

What were these tongues (γλῶσσα, *glōssa*) that we read about? How did they serve as a sign for unbelievers? Why did God choose a thing that seemed so weak and foolish that onlookers were filled with derision? *“Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.”* The Scripture goes on to say, *“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.”*<sup>viii</sup>

The many disciples spoke mysteries to God, understood by none of the local men.<sup>ix</sup> But to those who heard the truth spoken in their own tongues, by men who never *learned* to speak them, but were simply *given* utterance of praise and thanksgiving for *“the wonderful works of God,”* this was not a thing to be treated with contempt, but with fear. It was a sign. The division of mankind into different nations through the

confusion of tongues at Babel is undone within the Church. In Christ we are one Body, gathered by one Spirit from the four corners of the earth.

*“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”<sup>x</sup>*

Peter had no trouble identifying what had happened, and doing so from Scripture:

*“But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of 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: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.”<sup>xi</sup>*

Peter had changed. Before, he had been a “natural” (ψυχικός *psychikos*-soulish) man, unable earlier in his life to understand why the Christ, the Son of the Living God, was ready and willing to take up the Cross; later he was afraid and denied the Lord three times. But now he stood on his feet boldly, not afraid of death, having his mind focused on the truth, able to understand and know from Scripture everything that had unfolded and was unfolding. Though before he had been a disciple for more than three years, he was on this day closer to Christ than at any time before, even when he had seen Him with the eyes; for he was now part of the Body of which Christ is the Head.

Many a time Peter had stumbled and tripped over his own tongue and he had failed to speak the right words on the night in which his Lord was betrayed. But now he spoke with more clarity, more power and more authority than any prophet of the Old Covenant. He delivered the first Christian sermon, as he was now the fisher of men Christ had foreseen; his dragnet of words brought in about three thousand souls. The young Church, now empowered to be the Body of Christ, thrived with healthy vital signs.



None of this was man-made. The best efforts of organization could not have produced it; the most detailed planning could not have pulled it off. No human effort could have brought it forth in a day, because the Day of Pentecost was Chapter Two of the Word made flesh. The Body of Christ now came into the world.

What is the life of the Church? It is the Holy Spirit present within us. What is the strength of the Church? It is the power (δύναμις, *dunamis*) of God by His Holy Spirit, present within us. Frankly, in light of the foolishness of sinful men, it is very obvious that God's power and grace have never depended on anyone less than God Himself. Never think that we, as the Church, have succeeded in anything simply by our own human cleverness, or our best laid plans, or our own strength. We have an organized structure, but the permanent shape of that structure was revealed and enacted by the Holy Spirit. The whole life of the Church is *charismatic* (χάρισμα); from the receiving of Scripture to the Sacraments, from the Apostolic Succession to the faithful service of each member.

It was St. Paul, speaking in the context of spiritual gifts, who called the Church by the name of Christ Himself: *“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.... Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”*<sup>xii</sup>

So I have not spoken carelessly in saying that the Church is Chapter Two of the Incarnation. Jesus goes about now doing good and healing, and He chooses to do so through you, the Body of Christ and members in particular. Christ Himself is here by the Holy Spirit, the other Comforter who is with us and in us.

The feast of Pentecost in the Law of Moses, and for which the crowd in Jerusalem had gathered, was the day when the first sheaf of the harvest was waved before the Lord. It was also the same day that the Lord had descended on Mount Sinai, when the whole nation of Israel heard the voice of God as He spoke His Ten Commandments. Therefore, it is quite fitting that the Lord Jesus foretold the outpouring of the Spirit in terms of His Commandments: *“If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you*

*another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth.*”<sup>xiii</sup>

So if we remain faithful to Him, we continue to take part in His Incarnation as the Church, the Body of Christ. For His Spirit not only comes upon us, but abides within us always.

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The Rev’d Robert Hart<sup>xiv</sup>  
May 27, 2012

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<sup>i</sup> *This sermon was originally written on the Epistle at Mass on Whitsunday, 2012.*

<sup>ii</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxiv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>iii</sup> *Joel 2:28-end (KJV).*

<sup>iv</sup> *“Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer.” Concerning the Service of the Church, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>v</sup> *Acts 2:1-11 (KJV).*

<sup>vi</sup> *Acts 10:38 (KJV).*

<sup>vii</sup> *II Kings 2:9 ff; St. John 14:12.*

<sup>viii</sup> *Acts 2:13-15 (KJV).*

<sup>ix</sup> *I Corinthians 14:2.*

<sup>x</sup> *Revelation 5:9-10 (KJV).*

<sup>xi</sup> *Acts 2:16-18, quoting Joel 2:28 (KJV).*

<sup>xii</sup> *I Corinthians 12:12, 27 (KJV).*

<sup>xiii</sup> *St. John 14:15-17a (KJV).*

<sup>xiv</sup> *Rector, St. Benedict’s Anglican Catholic Church, Chapel Hill, NC.*