

The Feast of the Pentecost – Year A – 5/24/2026 – Msgr. Peter Quang Nguyen

First reading – Acts 2:1-11: At Pentecost, disciples received the Holy Spirit, speaking in diverse languages. A crowd, amazed, heard them in their own tongues, witnessing God’s wonders transcending language barriers.

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 104: I praise the great Lord, marveling at His vast creations. I pray my thoughts please Him as He renews the earth, giving and sustaining life with His Spirit.

Second reading – 1 Corinthians 12:3B-7, 12-13: Only by the Holy Spirit can one say, “Jesus is Lord.” Despite various gifts, ways of service, and workings, they all originate from one Spirit, serving the common good and uniting us as one body in Christ.

Gospel – John 20:19-23: Jesus appears to his disciples after his resurrection. He greets them with peace, shows them his wounds, and then breathes on them, giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit and commissioning them to forgive sins.

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Church tradition celebrates the Feast of Pentecost fifty days after Easter; this coincides with the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, which occurs fifty days after Passover. The Jewish Feast of Pentecost commemorates the event that took place fifty days after the crossing of the Red Sea—the reception of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. This event inaugurated a covenant in which God chose the people of Israel as His own possession; and, stemming from this divine manifestation on Mount Sinai, the people of Israel became a distinct religious community and God’s own special people.

Today, on the Feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends once again, initiating a new people of God: the Church. The imagery of God’s “theophany”—manifesting amidst billowing volcanic smoke and a mighty wind as He came to Moses to establish the distinct nation of Israel at Mount Sinai—is reenacted today. The Holy Spirit descends upon the Apostles in the form of tongues of fire and the sound of a rushing wind, thereby inaugurating a “new Israel”: all those who place their faith in Jesus Christ.

Following Saint Luke’s detailed account of this descent in the Acts of the Apostles, the Gospel reading according to Saint John—which we have just heard—also recounts the appearance of Jesus as He bestows the Holy Spirit upon His disciples.

There are numerous symbols associated with the Holy Spirit—such as wind, fire, breath, and the dove—alongside the specific gifts of the Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, and the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2)—traditionally known as the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, here we shall pause to reflect specifically upon two roles of the Holy Spirit highlighted in today’s Gospel: the Spirit of Peace and the Spirit of Forgiveness. 1. The Holy Spirit of Peace
“Jesus appeared, stood in the midst of the disciples, and said: ‘Peace be with you!’” (Jn 20:19).

Legend has it that, long ago, the artist Michael Cardo presented King Napoleon with an icon depicting a dove. The dove had an orange beak, blue wings, a yellow breast, and a gray tail. The King was astonished, for the dove resembled a tortoise rather than a bird. The artist Michael replied: “That is a symbol of the Holy Spirit; the orange-red represents the consuming divine fire, the blue represents peace, the yellow represents light, and the gray represents the color of reeds used to make a broom for sweeping.” The underlying meaning is that the Holy Spirit

sanctifies the tongues of the faithful to speak the Word of God; He is the light radiating from the heart (the breast) to shine God's love upon others; He sweeps away all hatred, division, and war; and, above all, He is the wings of peace that bring tranquility to the world.

The greeting of peace that Jesus extends to His disciples today evokes the imagery of the ancient patriarchs and the Jewish custom of greeting one another upon meeting. Peace was also the very first message that Jesus brought to humanity through the angels' song: "...Peace on earth to those whom God favors" (Lk 2:14). And now, as He bestows the Holy Spirit upon His disciples, Jesus employs that very same message: "Peace be with you" (Jn 20:19, 21). In other words, the Holy Spirit is the messenger of peace—and is, indeed, that very peace itself.

2. The Holy Spirit Forgives Sins

"Jesus breathed on the disciples and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven'" (Jn 20:22-23).

The formula of absolution in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is recited by the priest as follows: "God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son, has reconciled the world to Himself and pour out the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins ..." Thus, one of the roles of the Holy Spirit for humanity is precisely the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus bestowed this power to forgive sins upon the Apostles—His disciples—and their successors, when He breathed on the disciples and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (Jn 20:22-23). This is akin to the moment when the Lord entrusted authority to Peter—the chief Apostle: "I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; "...and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt 16:19...). This is indeed a most formidable authority. For the nature of this authority—understood through specific Hebrew terminology—may refer to the binding of demons during exorcism, the administration of ecclesiastical law regarding excommunication, and the authoritative judgment of matters concerning faith and morals.

This authority resides solely in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit; yet He has bestowed it upon the Church through the authority of His appointed representatives. Salvation flows from Christ through His Church, for the Church alone has received the Father's full revelation concerning Christ (cf. Mt 16:17).

In a broader sense, this power of "binding" also represents the seed of faith—sown from the very day of our Baptism—which enables every Christian to unlock and enter into the treasury of God's grace found within the Sacraments. Whether these doors remain closed or open depends upon the presence of charity or the closed-heartedness of the human heart. The grace of the forgiveness of sins is truly realized only when a spirit of forgiveness reigns supreme among all members of the Church.

In summary, through the Gospel of John proclaimed during today's celebration of Pentecost, Christians are called to pray for and to build peace within their own nations and throughout the world. And to attain this peace, all people stand in need of God's forgiveness—granted through His Holy Spirit—so that, in turn, they may also forgive one another.

Come, Holy Spirit! Amen.