

Lesson 1

Day of Pentecost

The Holy Gospel: John 7:37–39

Jesus and His disciples were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths. This was the last of the three great annual festivals that attracted Jewish people from all over the world to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. The celebration hailed the completion of the harvest and lasted seven days—with an eighth day added to note the end of the period of festivals. Jewish families fashioned small shelters (booths) outside their homes and “lived” in them during the celebration, remembering their ancestors’ forty years of wanderings in the wilderness. In the temple, the feast was observed with a daily sacrifice of bullocks on the altar of burnt offering. Another daily ceremony involved a procession of priests going to the Pool of Siloam with a golden pitcher to bring water to the temple. The procession circled the altar and then the water and a pitcher of wine from the drink offering were poured into two large, perforated, flat bowls—and the water flowing out of the bowls symbolized the water that gushed out of a rock to ease the thirst of their ancestors in the desert. During the ceremony, the people sang Isaiah 12:3, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation,” and Psalm 118:25, “Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!”

It was probably in connection with this water ceremony that Jesus positioned Himself so He could be heard by the crowd and called out: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.”

1. What was the drinking that Jesus was inviting people to do? What would be the result of their drinking what Jesus was offering? When had Jesus referred to the gift of living water prior to this?

2. Why did Jesus back up His offer to the people with a reference to Scripture?

Jesus did not quote verbatim from an Old Testament passage but gave the general thrust of passages such as Isaiah 58:11 and Zechariah 14:8. Though the Spirit of God had been present and active among God’s people throughout Old Testament history, John interpreted Jesus’ words in terms of what happened later on the day we are remembering today, Pentecost.

3. How could John, in verse 39, say, “The Spirit had not been given”? What did he say had to happen before the Spirit could be given in the way he was recalling and to which he was pointing? What, then, is the essential difference between the Spirit’s activity in Old Testament times (also in the ministry of John the Baptist) and the Spirit’s activity on Pentecost and thereafter?

4. How are the rivers of living water that flow *from* Christians related to the water they *receive* when they “drink” of Jesus?

5. How does this living water flow from you to those around you?

The Old Testament Lesson: Numbers 11:24–30

The seventy elders “prophesied.” The *Concordia Self-Study Bible* explains, “The Hebrew verb here is not in the form in which it is usually found to express the mediation of a prophetic message through the Spirit. It probably means that they gave ecstatic expression to an intense religious experience” (p. 206). We are not told that Eldad and Medad opposed Moses’ call to meet at the tabernacle, though for some reason they didn’t come to the meeting. But when the Lord gave the Spirit who enabled Moses to the elders, the Spirit came also upon Eldad and Medad, who prophesied among the people in the camp.

6. What motivated Joshua’s suggestion that Moses put a stop to their prophesying? What does Moses’ response reveal about this great leader of God’s people?

7. What does this incident teach us for life in the Church today?

8. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Acts 2:1–21

Pentecost, a Jewish harvest festival, was celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover, which was the fifteenth day of the month of Nisan. As a result, it did not occur on the same day of the week each year. In the year of the great event that we remember today, AD 30, Pentecost occurred on a Saturday, a Sabbath Day. As the Early Church began to observe Pentecost, celebrating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it was observed on the fiftieth day after Easter, counting Easter as day one. Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox—making it a variable date, but always a Sunday. Pentecost is celebrated on a Sunday seven weeks later.

“There came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.” It helps to know that both the Hebrew word *ruach* and the Greek word *pneuma* conveyed the concept of “spirit” as well as the concepts of “air” and “wind.” Jesus also used the wind as an illustration of the Spirit’s “blowing” wherever He wishes.

9. What was God’s purpose in the sound like a violent wind on Pentecost?

10. Jesus had blessed His apostles with the Holy Spirit when He commissioned them to speak for Him as His representatives on Easter Sunday in the Upper Room. What was added by the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost?

11. What looked like “divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them” in token of what was taking place. Why fire? (See Luke 3:16.)

12. Who are the “each one of them” and the “they were all” upon whom this outpouring of the Holy Spirit came? (See Acts 1:12–15; 2:1.) What does it say about this group that they were all together in one place?

The sound like wind and the tongues like fire evidently were temporary signs of what was taking place. The crowd heard the sound and gathered, but there is no indication that the tongues like fire were seen by people other than those in the house. The manifestation of the Spirit that lasted longer and that touched the crowd was the newly enabled ability of these followers of Jesus to speak in tongues. The Greek for “tongues” is *glossais* and means “languages.” The experience evidently was a happy surprise.

13. What was God’s purpose in giving the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost? How did the Pentecost experience differ from later manifestations of this gift of tongues in places like Corinth? (See 1 Corinthians 14:1–4.)

Some of the “Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven” in Jerusalem at this time were pilgrims who had come for the festival days. Others were elderly Jews who had moved to Jerusalem to live their last years near the temple after having lived their whole lives in other countries. These foreign Jews probably could handle some Aramaic and Greek, but they were surprised and pleased when they suddenly found Galilean Jews declaring the wonders of God in their mother tongues.

14. How was the crowd divided about what they were witnessing and experiencing?

Peter used the skeptics’ “They are filled with new wine” as a springboard for his message, first making it clear that “these people are not drunk.” Jews of that time carried out morning sacrifices before the first meal, a meal of bread. They did not drink wine until the evening meal, a more complete meal when also some meat might be eaten. So Peter dismissed the idea of their being drunk at 9:00 a.m. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he quoted the prophecy of Joel to explain what was happening. It was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was predicted in their sacred Scripture as part of God’s plan that “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Having gained the full attention of the crowd by quoting Joel’s prophecy to explain what was happening, Peter went on to proclaim Jesus as the Christ to his eager listeners. Sample key Christ-centered sentences in Peter’s Pentecost message: Acts 2:22–23, 32, 36, 38–39.