

PENTECOST, 1993 - FAIRLAWN

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, OF THE SON AND OF
THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

"WHILE THE DAY OF PENTECOST WAS RUNNING ITS
COURSE, THEY WERE ALL TOGETHER IN ONE PLACE,
WHEN SUDDENLY THERE CAME FROM THE SKY A
NOISE LIKE THAT OF A STRONG DRIVING WIND,
WHICH FILLED THE WHOLE HOUSE WHERE THEY
WERE SITTING . . . AND THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH
THE HOLY SPIRIT . . ." [ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, 2]

Today the Christian Church throughout the world

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is celebrating Pentecost, the fiftieth day after the Resurrection of the Lord, when the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. We commemorate this event every year, since it is significant for us as an assembly of faithful Christians and also as individual followers of Christ.

St Luke the author of the third Gospel as well as the Acts of the Apostles, makes a special effort to bring to our attention what happened on the day of the first Pentecost Sunday. He says,

"while the day of Pentecost was running its course," the Apostles "were together in one place." This statement by St. Luke, who was an eyewitness to the events he

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described, is a very important

testimony to the founding of the Church and warrants a commentary.

The Holy Apostles had gathered in the Upper Room to pray together and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Christ Himself had promised His disciples expect the Holy Spirit. From St. Luke's statement it is clear that had the disciples not gathered in the Upper Room and had they not been together in faith, spirit and mind, the Holy Spirit would not have descended on them.

Christ always referred to His disciples as a collective body, particularly in reference to the presence of the Holy Spirit in their midst. On the fiftieth day after the

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Resurrection, the Holy Spirit descended on that collective body and "there appeared to them tongues like flames of fire, dispersed among them and resting on each one. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." The Apostles were not filled with the Holy Spirit because of their individual righteousness and virtue, but because they were gathered in His Name and as His followers.

According to the Gospel of St. John, Christ called the Apostles His friends and promised to pray to the Father to give them the Spirit of Truth as their advocate. This is a great gift given only to those who know the Spirit of Truth, about which Our Lord made the following statement: "You know him, because he dwells with you

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and is in you." *You* refers to the church or the collective body of Christians, which alone possesses the knowledge of the Spirit of Truth. Christ's promise that the Father would send the Holy Spirit as an Advocate was directed at the collective body of the faithful.

The assembly of the Apostles in the Upper Room was the founding stone of the Church. Unlike contemporary empires, kingdoms and buildings, the first church established in Jerusalem did not crumble to dust, since it was a spiritual, living and an eternal institution, which is relevant for generations of all times, including our own..

Common worship turns us into one corporate entity or one body and strengthens us in our faith and enables us

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to reach the pinnacle of knowledge. We attain the knowledge of the Truth, which is neither empirical nor philosophical, by receiving the Grace of God from above. We must accept God's gift by opening the doors of our soul before the Holy Spirit.

Every time the Divine Liturgy is celebrated, the scene at the Upper Room on the day of the Pentecost is reenacted. Every participant is given the opportunity to experience what the Holy Apostles felt on that great day. As the Holy Spirit descends on the bread and the wine, which represent the symbols of the body and blood of our Lord, we pray to God that His Spirit also descend on us individually since we are members of the corporate body

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which was initially founded in Jerusalem.

On this day, we must turn our minds to the mystery of the presence of the Holy spirit in our midst. The fact that we as a continuation of the first church are a part and parcel of that eternal institution reassures us that the Holy Spirit is here with us. I pray to the Father that he breathe into us and fill us with the grace of His Spirit of Truth. As recipients of the Grace of God, we become one with Christ. This great gift from God will give us real life and guide us in our endeavors and efforts in public and private life.

We must not forget to thank God for His providential treatment of mankind. Our follies and sins warrant severe punishment, but God is merciful. He graces our imperfect

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human nature by His Holy Spirit. We must realize the value of that gift, which we receive at the baptismal font. We must also make a sincere effort to be guided by the Spirit of God in our parish and private affairs. Amen.

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