

Homily for Pentecost Sunday 2019

The Fruit of Pentecost

On the Mount of Olives there is an ancient grotto where the Lord met with his apostles. It is believed that it was here that he taught them to pray the Lord's Prayer. When I was there on Wednesday January 23rd this year, I thought to myself, I want to share with the St. Peter's family the experience of this day on the Feast of Pentecost. As you can see from these photos the Lord's Prayer is written in over 100 languages with the English version depicted here.

Here is a video of the Grotto where it is believed Jesus met regularly with the Apostles and foretold the destruction of Jerusalem in 67-70AD. It was here that he taught them this famous prayer. At first, we heard a recording of the prayer in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke and then we prayed:

Show video

I thought these photos so timely for the Feast of Pentecost because as we read in Acts, those gathered in Jerusalem around 33 AD heard these men from Galilee, who spoke Aramaic, like Jesus, speaking in languages they would not have known. Luke summarizes their experience when he quotes:

In our own language we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power

What is it we know about these people hearing the proclamation in their own native tongue? We are told they are devout men from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. This is an important point. Those who hear the Apostles speaking are men a faith who as devout Jews have come to Jerusalem, or live in Jerusalem, and are there for the Feast of Pentecost.

You know how we as Catholics take seriously the Liturgical Calendar as we have experienced the Seasons of Lent, Holy Week, the Triduum and the seven weeks of Easter? We express our devotion to the blessed Trinity through our observance of these Liturgical days. The same was true for our Jewish forebears.

They were devout because we find in Leviticus 23, the Old Testament Liturgical calendar. The Jews had an annual cycle of festivals and feasts just like we Catholics do. They had seven major festivals listed in Leviticus 23.

Of the seven festivals mentioned in Leviticus 23 two have been incorporated into our devotional calendar as Catholics. Passover and Pentecost. The word Easter in Latin is pascha, that is simply Passover. The second though is Pentecost. Pentecost was a Jewish festival before it became a Christian festival.

Rmember the Feast of Passover was when Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead. The Jews would count seven weeks from Passover, $7 \times 7 = 49$, and then add one day to that and on that 50th day they would celebrate a great feast. Now in Greek it's called Pentecost, in Hebrew in the Old Testament it was called the Feast of Weeks, or *Shavuoth* in Hebrew because the Hebrew name focuses on the seven weeks of the

season that took place between Passover and Pentecost, or between Passover and the Feast of Weeks. Now Pentecost or Weeks was a very important Jewish festival because it was one of the three festivals that was a pilgrimage feast when every adult Jewish male was expected to go to Jerusalem.

There are two associations I want to make between Passover and Pentecost. The first is agricultural and the second theological.

At the Festival of Passover, the Jewish nation would celebrate what was called the harvesting of the first fruits. It would mark cutting of the first sheaf of grain that would then be offered in the Jerusalem Temple. Then 50 days later on the Feast of Pentecost they would bring in the full harvest.

Now think about this in relation to the Church. On Easter Sunday Jesus' Resurrection was the first fruit of a harvest that was yet to come. Indeed in 1 Corinthians 15 St. Paul describes Jesus' Resurrection in relation to the Passover Festival:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died

Paul understood that Jesus death and resurrection were like the first crop of the spring harvest, and anticipated a greater harvest to come. Now on the Feast of Pentecost the power of God is represented by these 120 people gathered in the Upper Room speaking so that the whole world could hear and respond to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The connection between Passover and Pentecost when we think of the agricultural association is one celebrating that the Church is like a crop. It started small with Jesus teaching the Lord's Prayer in a language no longer spoken, so that now at the Pater Noster it is represented in over 100 languages. On Easter Sunday it was 10 gathered in the Upper Room – Judas was dead, and Thomas had not present – when Jesus appeared to them with his resurrected body, Now 50 days later the ten are there, plus Thomas and Matthias, the one who replaced Judas. But not only them, we are told there are in total 120 there.

Now think about that number. 120 is 12 x 10. Why is that important? You will see when I tell you about the theological importance of this day.

On the Feast of Passover, the theological significance was when the 12 tribes were delivered from the bondage of the Egyptians after more than 400 years of captivity. Pentecost, in Jewish tradition, became the memorial of arriving at Mount Sinai and receiving the law from God in the book of Exodus 19 and 20. So for example, in one Jewish tradition from the Babylonian Talmud it says that Pentecost is "the day on which the Torah was given" to Israel, meaning the day on which the 10 Commandments were given to Israel when they were at Mount Sinai and Moses went up the mountain and got the 10 Commandments from God.

Let me read for you the pertinent verses from Exodus 19 that associate Sinai with Pentecost as we read of it in Acts 2:

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings,

and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire...

Then it goes on to narrate how out of that fire God speaks and Moses goes and receives the law, he receives the Ten Commandments. Now notice the parallel here. In the Old Testament account of Mt. Sinai, the Lord descends upon Israelites, which are twelve tribes, in fire. In the new covenant account of Pentecost in Acts, the Holy Spirit descends upon the Apostles and the first Christians in tongues of fire. So, what we have here in every way is really a new giving of the law, it's a new Mount Sinai in essence. What also is going on here though is whereas in the Old Testament they received the law in tablets of stone that were written with the finger of God, now the Holy Spirit comes down and indwells the Apostles, so that the law, the new law of the new covenant, is going to be written on their hearts, to be infused into them. They are going to receive that gift interiorly, and that's one of the major differences between the old covenant and the new covenant is the interiority of the new covenant. They are going to be empowered by the Holy Spirit himself to keep the law and to proclaim the good news. So, what's happening here on Mount Zion, Jerusalem, is a new Mount Sinai.

The twelve Apostles are the New Israel who have been given a new law written on their hearts. The 120 therefore represent the harvest that will then go out into all the world.

It is a celebration that finds expression here at St. Peter's where because of what happened on Sinai and in Jerusalem we are present today. And as the Holy Spirit empowered those gathered with Mary in the Upper Room so too, He empowers us.

God does not forced anyone, He takes what we give Him; but he does not give Himself wholly to us, until we give ourselves wholly to Him. (St Theresa of Avilla)