

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Day of Pentecost
June 4, 2017

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For us a special part of the Pentecost Sunday observance is having the *Acts 2:1-11* lesson read in foreign languages. On the very first Pentecost many visitors to Jerusalem heard the proclamation of the gospel good news in their own tongues. And that phenomenon continues to this very day. Mass is celebrated in twenty or more languages every Sunday in the Archdiocese of Boston, including Elizabethan English! This in itself is a sign of the work of the Holy Spirit Who was promised to guide and guard Christ's Church and lead her into all truth.

But the dramatic events recorded in *The Acts of the Apostles* must not obscure the startling fact that St Luke, in the Book of Acts, and St John in the Gospel appointed for Pentecost, describe the coming of the Holy Spirit *in very different circumstances*. "Difference of approach" is a fair way to describe St John's Gospel from the other three. This is true not only in the *events* St John is inspired to describe, but in the *way* He expresses the gospel message. And it does not detract from the other three evangelists to say that St John knew what he was doing! That is the Church's verdict. Ten of the past twelve Sunday gospel texts have been taken from St John. Not only that. These are the Sundays when the Church has been commemorating the great saving events of redemption. This is like bringing out the china, silver, and crystal for the best occasions!

St John was profoundly convinced of the truth of Christ's Gospel. He saw that the Church faced a challenging opportunity. By the time John wrote, it was clear the Gospel had to be communicated to people who were not Jews but Greeks. The Greek way of thinking was not oriented towards Old Testament prophecy. The Greeks were philosophers. They made inquiry and sought truth not through historical events but through abstract ideas.

St John wrote to this audience which had vast potential for conversion to Christian faith. That explains why John called Our Lord Jesus "The Word of God" the *logos*. The prophecy of *messiah*, so important to the Jews, meant nothing to the Greeks. And in the Fourth Gospel the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Christ the Word, breathed on the apostolic band by the Risen Lord on Easter Day, not on Pentecost. The Greeks would not have been particularly knowledgeable about the significance of the Hebrew liturgical year. Pentecost was a Jewish festival.

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So St John's Gospel had a different target. This fact makes his description of the Christian proclamation understandable. Not only that, but all the other New Testament writers and early Church Fathers attest to what St John so eloquently set forth. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, guides us into all truth. The Truth is not corroborated opinion, or the coming together of consensus. And it is certainly nothing so banal as "you have your truth and I have my truth." Behind the Truth is not any philosophical maxim or system. St John was bringing Divine Revelation to the Greeks. Behind the Truth is a *Person* Who declared, "I am the Truth." All truth has its origin and destiny in Jesus Christ. It is the conviction of the Catholic Church that if the secular world ever allows men and women to freely and honestly pursue truth, the pursuit will lead to Jesus Christ.

Ever since the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, (whether it was initially by fire and the sound of a mighty rushing wind, or by Christ's life-breath infused into the souls of the apostles) the Lord's Church is not composed of men and women who like to remember there was a Jesus once upon a time! That is a non-starter if ever there was one! Rather, these are people who witness worldwide and in a myriad of languages and cultures, that the Church is the continuing Presence of Christ, both on earth and in the heavenly realm, among His people. The unity and fellowship of these people is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit and the sign of His Presence. We say *His* Presence. For the Holy Spirit is not an "it" or a concept or idea but a Person. In the wonderful Divine Family we call The Holy Trinity, He is Christ's Spirit, by Whom the Lord Jesus lives in us and we in Him.