

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on the Solemnity of Pentecost
May 31, 2020

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You have just heard two very different descriptions of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Church. Was it on Pentecost, in the dramatic events of tongues of fire and the gospel proclaimed in many languages? Or was it in the Upper Room on Easter Day night, when Our Lord Jesus breathed on the apostles and said “Receive the Holy Spirit?”

This is not an either/or choice! Holy Church gives us Fifty Days of Easter, ending with the great celebration of Pentecost. *πέντε* is Greek for **fifty**. But the Church also says St John knows what he proclaimed when his gospel records the gift of the Holy Spirit on Easter Day itself. Part of the Church’s verdict is that ten of the past twelve Sunday gospel texts have been taken from Saint John’s Gospel. Not only that. These are for Sundays when the Church has been commemorating the great saving events of redemption. It is like bringing out the china and polishing the silver for the best occasions!

By the time St John wrote, it was clear Jesus Christ had to be communicated to people who were not Jews, but Greek. This opened a vast potential for conversion to Christian faith. But the concept of Messiah, which was so important to Jews, meant nothing to Greeks. That explains why St John called Our Lord Jesus “The Word of God, the *λόγος*.” St John explained the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ *The Word*, and that it was Easter Day, not Pentecost, when the Risen Lord breathed the Holy Spirit on the apostles. The Greeks would not have been knowledgeable about the significance of the Hebrew liturgical year. Pentecost was a Jewish festival.

St John had a different target for his gospel. This fact makes his approach understandable. And the other New Testament writers and the early Church Fathers attest to what John so eloquently sets forth: that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, guides us into all truth. That truth is not opinion corroborated by general consensus. It does not allow any pseudo-definition such as “you have your truth and I have mine.” There is not just some philosophical maxim or system behind truth. Behind truth is a *Person* Who declared “I am the Truth.” All truth has its origin and destiny in Jesus Christ. If the world allows men and women to freely and honestly pursue truth, the pursuit will lead them to Jesus Christ.

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From the gift of the Holy Spirit, by Christ's life-breath infused into the souls of the apostles, and experienced fifty days later by fire and the sound of a mighty-rushing wind, the Church is composed not of men and women who like to remember there was a Jesus once upon a time. That is a non-starter for religion if ever there was one! Rather, these are people who witness world-wide, in a myriad of language and cultures, that the Church is the continuing Presence of Christ 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." He is not a concept or idea. The Holy Spirit is a Person. He is Christ's Spirit by Whom the Lord Jesus lives in us and we in Him. That gift is what we commemorate on Pentecost.