

Year C Pentecost
Acts 2:1-11; Ps 104; Rom 8:8-17; Jn 20:19-23
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The Jewish feast of Weeks (*Shavu'ot*), in Greek “Pentecost” (=“fiftieth,” referring to fifty days after Passover), was like the culmination of Passover, which celebrated liberation from slavery in Egypt. Pentecost was the occasion on which Jewish Passover pilgrims remained in Jerusalem, and brought their first fruits to the Temple (Dt 26:1-11). The first reading mentions these pilgrims.

Jesus effected the true “Passover” from bondage to sin (in which we were all mired) into the freedom of the children of God (cf. Rom 8:21-24). This is the new, the final exodus (see Luke 9:31) into the “Promised Land” of God’s presence (Heb 11:8-10, 13-16, 39-40). As the first covenant was entered into in Sinai with Moses (Ex 24), the new and everlasting covenant was inaugurated by Jesus in Jerusalem (Lk 22:20; cf. Gal 4:24-26). This covenant required a circumcised heart, a new heart (Dt 30:6; Jer 4:4; 31:31-34; Ez 36:24-29). This is what the Holy Spirit does, Acts 15:8-9; Col 2:11-13; Phil 3:3; Rom 2:28-29. It is this “operation” of the Spirit which makes us pleasing and acceptable to God, children of God. This is what the second reading from Rom says.

This results in a new creation, 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15. In first creation, God had breathed his breath (*nishmah*, not *ruah* □, “spirit”) into Adam, Gen 2:7. But a new creation, a real resurrection (see Ezek 37) was needed, and this required the same creating Spirit of God as was operative in first creation (as the psalm sings). This is what Christ, the New Adam, did for us, 1 Cor 15:45. In Acts, Luke presents to us a gradual sequence of events: after Christ died and rose on the third day, he told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the “promise of my Father,” then appeared to the disciples for forty days, and ten days later, on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes down on the Church as wished-for by Moses (Num 11:29) and predicted by the prophet Joel (3, quoted in Acts 2 :17-21). In our gospel reading, Jesus “hands over” the Spirit (not “gives up the ghost!”), having finished his task (“work”); the disciples receive this Spirit on the day of the resurrection, Jn 20:22.

This Holy Spirit is what really purifies us in baptism, which is not just a matter of water (see Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16). It is like fire, as in Pentecost (and on Sinai, Ex 19:18). Jesus was the one who really underwent this purification for us: see what he says in Lk 12:49-50; cf. Lk 2:22. But we all need to be “salted” with this fire, Mk 9:49.