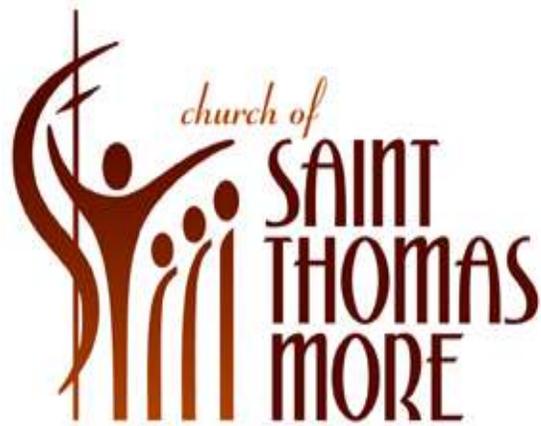


Pentecost

Just for a moment, imagine yourself gathered in that house with the disciples 2000 years ago. Jesus, your leader, your teacher, your friend, was gone from this earth. Maybe you are thinking about his parting words, promising that the Father would send “the Advocate, the Holy Spirit” in his name.

Suddenly a huge noise “like a driving wind” and drowns everything out. A tongue of fire appears and hovers in the air above. Before you get a chance to think, the fire splits into many flames, one of which comes to rest on you. You start to tell people about what is happening, but the words coming out of your mouth are foreign to you. You go out of the house and begin to preach and everyone hears you in their own language, even though there are people from at least 15 different countries present.



Fast forward those 2000 years and look around St. Thomas More today. Can you see people from many different nations represented here today by the distinctive, colorful clothing they are wearing? Scattered among them, do you see others dressed in red, as if flames of fire have come to rest with each person? Gathering today, we mirror that first Pentecost. We may not say, as in the first reading, “we are Parthians, Medes and Elamites...” but we can say, “we are Hispanic, Pilipino, Vietnamese, of Asian, African and European descent...” You will even find yourself singing today in a language that is not your own!

Each of the different people you see here today bring their own special gifts to this celebration. Different people, different countries, different gifts, different works, different forms of service. You saw those many different ministries in our gathering procession.

At the heart of it all, we, the different people share one same Spirit. St. Paul tells us in the second reading: “to each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.”

St. Thomas More is indeed blessed with people of different gifts. In the Vatican II documents, we are told that *“For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married life, their daily labor, their mental and physical relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne - all of these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* (Constitution on the Church # 34)

What matters is not the nature of the gift, but that through each gift the Spirit is working to “renew the face of the earth.” That’s the power of Pentecost!

Pentecost – Week of Weeks

The earliest Christians saw the 50 days of the Easter season as “a week of weeks.” In the Creation story, the seven-day week was a sign of God’s fullness, of completeness. So seven weeks of seven days would be an even greater sign of God’s goodness—the new Creation.

I was always bad at math, but even I know that seven weeks of seven days would be 49 — not 50. But with God's goodness, there is always more than we can calculate; more than we can count. So our Easter season is not only 49 days, but seven times seven PLUS ONE MORE to make 50 days.

Pentecost: the name itself means "fiftieth". Pentecost was originally an Old Testament festival, calculated as beginning on the fiftieth day after the beginning of Passover. It was an agricultural festival celebrating and giving thanks for the "first fruits" of the season.

Even in early New Testament times, Pentecost gradually lost its association with agriculture and became associated with the celebration of God's creation of His people and their religious history. By the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the festival focused exclusively on God's gift of the Torah (the "Law") on Mount Sinai. It continues to be celebrated in this manner in modern Judaism.

When we think of Pentecost, the most significant image is from the second chapter of Acts, with the familiar scene of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples in the "upper room."

So in these 50 days, we make a pilgrimage — from empty tomb to upper room. Both involve "fear". On Easter, we heard that the women did not stay at the tomb, but fled in fear. Next week, the Gospel tells us the disciples were huddled in the upper room out of fear. Yet in both cases, an encounter with the Risen Christ dispels the fear and compels people to go forth.

On Easter, Christ tells the women to go to the apostles and tell them the Good News. In the Gospel, Jesus greets his disciples with "peace", breathes on them and bestows on them the gift of the Holy Spirit. As we know from Acts, the Holy Spirit bursts into the upper room and completely fills the disciples, compelling them out to share the Good News with all the languages of the world

Pentecost -Celebrating Our Diversity

The feast of Pentecost is perhaps one of the most memorable of the Church's solemnities, thanks to the dramatic description from the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a driving wind and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in difference tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim." (Acts 2: 2-4)

Author Luke then gives a list of the people from the various countries that heard the Apostles speak "in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God." (Acts 2: 11) Thus, Pentecost is commemorated as the day Christianity spread to the world. The Good News of the Risen Christ heard by people of many lands.

As noted above, we at St. Thomas More are descended from people of many lands. And on Pentecost, we invite everyone to join in celebrating our diversity, and our unity. Parishioners celebrate our diversity by wearing the colorful clothing of celebration from their native land. So when we glance around the church on Pentecost, we see a representation of our diverse heritage. If people don't have clothing that is particular to their culture, they simply wear the

traditional colors of Pentecost: red and white.

To further celebrate the many different people that make up our St. Thomas More community, we sing songs in a variety of languages. So that, just like that first Pentecost, people can hear in many tongues of the mighty acts of God. The unity of our voices will add to the celebration, so that we become a living sign of the universal, Catholic, church.

And the very act of gathering around the table of the Lord for the Eucharist celebrates our unity in Christ. As we so often sing, *“and we, though many, throughout the earth, we are one body in this one Lord.”* (from *“One Bread One Body”* by John Foley, SJ)

Pentecost – Celebrating Our Ministry

In addition to being a celebration of the day the Word of God was heard by many different races of people, Pentecost is a celebration of the many ways the Word of God is spread through service. We take Christ out to the world through diverse ministries; from St. Vincent de Paul and Stephen Ministry to teaching ministries of Catechists and leaders in RCIA to liturgical ministries that serve during mass.

On Pentecost, we invite the many ministries that serve our parish to carry a banner in procession at the start of each mass. The banners these ministries have already created will help us all understand there are many ways to live out Jesus' message of love and service.

There are as many reasons why people join a particular ministry as there are ministries. Someone may become a catechist or a lector because they want to share their faith. Someone may join a ministry because they want to meet new people. Another person may join the choir because they like to sing. Some may have experienced a calling to give more of themselves to the community in which they pray.

In reality, the reasons why a person joins a particular ministry are not as important as the reasons they stay and how they practice their ministry. Most of our ministers find that ministry, like medicine or law, is a practice. Like medicine and law, practicing ministry requires dedication, a growing knowledge of various disciplines, like spirituality or theology, and training in specific skills like proclamation or singing.

Many of our ministers spend hours in preparation for their ministry. For example, Stephen Ministers complete 50 hours of training before beginning their service. Such dedication is wonderful and is another reason to celebrate our ministries on Pentecost!

Steve Raml
Director of Liturgy & Music