

## Pentecost: Yr. A – 2020

[Acts 2:1-11 • 1 Cor 12:3b-7,12-13 • Jn 20:19-23]

Pentecost is the birthday of the Church, but have you ever thought of the Church as a gift from God and for God? When we think of the Church do we see an institution, an organization with similar interests, or a bureaucracy? When we speak of the Church, we mean the people of God and the Mystical Body of Christ. So, why are we a gift from God and for God?

God's first thought about Himself during creation was, *"Let us make man in our image."* Hence God desires humanity as a gift; He needs someone to whom He can share His love. We are only a gift to God when we make a return on His love. The good news is God does not give up on us, even when we sin. His first questions of sinful humanity were: He asked Adam and Eve, *"Where are you?"* and Cain, *"Where is your brother Abel?"* Obviously, God cares what happens to us since we are His gift.

To call us back into communion, God chose a people. God's elect or chosen people was Israel. The word God used for His chosen people was *ecclesia* in Greek which means church. God called Israel into a covenant through Moses: *"If you obey me completely and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession among all peoples"* (Ex 19:5). And later through the Prophet Jeremiah, *"You shall be my people, and I will be your God"* (Jer 30:22). Then God promised something new, He would personally shepherd us. Ezekiel prophesied, *"Thus says the Lord God ... I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out"* (Ez 34:11).

Jesus fulfilled this prophecy by coming as a human baby and then offering a new covenant. He chose a new Israel or church beginning with the twelve Apostles. Just as Moses sprinkled blood upon the people to seal the covenant, so Jesus gave His blood at the Last Supper saying, *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"* (Mt 26:28).

This means the Church is not an institution, an organization, nor a bureaucracy, it is a body – Jesus' Mystical Body. Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen put it this way: *"Do you ever say, 'I do not want your lips, eyes, and hands ... standing between me and you?' After all, how can I communicate anything to you except by something visible, tangible, and carnal? [...] When our blessed Lord came to this earth and took upon Himself a human body, you would not say, 'I do not want this body of Christ standing between me and my love of Christ.' [...] No, His body was the means by which He made Himself [available] to us."*

St. Paul taught that we are many parts of one body. He learned this while persecuting the Church in Damascus and a bright light struck him down. He heard, *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"* He asked, *"Who are you, sir?"* The reply came, *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting"* (Acts 9:4-5). Paul was confused for Jesus had died almost ten years earlier and he was only persecuting his followers. Paul learned that when you step on the foot, the mouth screams. Thus the followers and Jesus were one and the same. They were the parts of the body and Jesus was the head.

The raw material of this new body was the Apostles. Just as our body is made up of countless cells, yet it is unified by one soul and governed by our head, so the Church is made up of countless Christians, unified by the soul of the Spirit, and governed by the head, Jesus. This is why we are a gift from God and for God.

Every gift from God has a purpose or mission. God said, *"Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful ... So shall my word be ... It shall not return to me empty"* (Is 55:10-11). In the Creed, we say the Church is *"one, holy, catholic, and apostolic."* This was modeled at Pentecost by the first Church praying as one for the Spirit, made holy with the descent of the Spirit, embraced being catholic when they spread the faith globally, and were apostolic or given the mission to be Christ's presence. For St. Irenaeus said, *"Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God,"* and St. Augustine stated, *"Christ and the Church are two in one flesh."*