

*Christ's Ascension and the Descent of the Holy Spirit
upon the Blessed Mother and the Apostles on Pentecost*

by Fr. Jim Anderson, M.S.A.

The descent of the Holy Spirit on the Blessed Mother and the Apostles fifty days after Jesus' resurrection recounted in Chapter 2 of Luke's Book of Acts is considered the birthday of Christ's Church. This great Pentecost event was preceded in God's plan by Jesus' bodily Ascension to the right hand of his Father in heaven and being seated in exaltation as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This fulfilled the prophecies in 2 Samuel 7 that a son of David would reign as King over Israel forever, in Psalm 103:19 that the Lord has established his throne in the heavens and reigns over all, and in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 that God's Suffering Servant must die for our sins, and that in consequence He would prosper, be lifted high and be greatly exalted. Jesus' Ascension marks the end of his physical presence in his Church and the beginning of the indwelling of his Church by his Holy Spirit.

In Luke 24:33-53 the two disciples with whom Jesus had conversed in Emmaus returned to Jerusalem and joined the eleven. Jesus, himself, appeared and told the group: *"This is what I meant when I said, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms, has to be fulfilled."* He then opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, *"So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this. And now I am sending down to you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city then, until you are clothed with the power from on high."* Then he took them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. Now as he blessed them, he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven."

Luke continues this narrative in Acts. *"Now having met together, they asked him"* if the time had come for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. He told them not be concerned with dates; that the Father would decide, *"but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth."* Then He rose on a cloud out of their sight, and angels told them Jesus had been taken to heaven, and will return in the same way as they saw him go. Acts 1:6-11

The arrival of Pentecost day found Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James of Alphaeus, Simon Zealot and Jude of James staying together in an upper room together with several women disciples, the Blessed Mother and several close relatives, all joined in continuous prayer. Suddenly they heard a powerful wind from heaven and tongues of fire came, separated and came to rest on the head of each. All were filled with the Holy Spirit *"and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech."* The sound drew a large crowd of the visitors to Jerusalem from many foreign lands and the Apostles spoke to them. Each heard them *"preaching in [his] own language about the marvels of God. Everyone was amazed and unable to explain it..."* Acts 1:12-14, 2:1-13

Peter then delivered an inspired and impassioned address: *“Brothers, no one can deny that the patriarch David himself is dead and buried: his tomb is still with us. But since he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn him an oath to make one of his descendants succeed him on the throne, what he foresaw and spoke about was the resurrection of the Christ: he is the one who was not abandoned in Hades, and whose body did not experience corruption. God raised this man Jesus to life, and all of us are witnesses to that. Now raised to the heights by God’s right hand, he has received from the Father the Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit. For David himself never went up to heaven, and yet these words are his: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for you.’ For this reason the whole House of Israel can be certain that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ. Peter touched their hearts, told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and that they, also, would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. “They were convinced by his arguments, and they accepted what he said and were baptized. That very day about three thousand were added to their number.” Acts 2:29-41*

According to the plan of the eternal Father his beloved Son took to himself our human nature, in addition to his divine nature as the only begotten Son of the Father. As the innocent Man-God Jesus took the consequences of our sins on his own flesh, dying in loving obedience to his Father in his human nature in our stead and obtaining Divine Mercy for us instead of the Divine Justice we deserved, reconciling all who accept him to his Father. He rose from the dead, leading his faithful to eternal life within the Blessed Trinity. He ascended to the right hand of his Father from where he reigns in glory forever. He sends his Holy Spirit to sanctify and lead his Church to perfect holiness until, finally, he will gather his faithful and present them, his Mystical Body, to his Father. Then, God will be all in all!

Jesus Christ is Lord. There is no other. Nor can there ever be another. Amen.
Alleluia!