Today we commemorate Pentecost, a pivotal moment in the story of our Christian faith. However, Pentecost was originally a Jewish holiday known as the Feast of Weeks, celebrating the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. As such, it is observed 50 days (seven weeks) after Passover. But as Christians, we celebrate Pentecost 50 days after Easter, marking the descent of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Christian Church.

Let’s recall briefly how we arrive to this day. In the weeks following Easter, there was a period of profound transformation. We started at the empty tomb, where we found not death but the astonishing promise of resurrection. Then we saw the risen Christ appearing before his disciples numerous times, showing his wounds, reminding them of his love, giving them hope, and finally delivering the Great Commission to them,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

With this, Jesus also instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Holy Spirit,

“After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father.” Acts 1:3-4

After receiving these instructions, the disciples waited and prayed, anticipating the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise. This was the period of great revelations and changes when they, and we, through their testimony, came to fully comprehend the magnitude of Christ’s divine mission and his gift of salvation for all people: to bring the hope of new life to everyone where death and evil are no more. And today, on Pentecost, we are reminded of when this promise was fulfilled, making all things new, turning the world upside down, and giving new meaning to our lives.

Here is the story of how it happened. This is Acts 2:1-8,

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?”

After this, Peter explained the life of Jesus and the meaning of his death and resurrection. Then, in Acts 2:37-42, this happened,

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Acts 1 and 2 are the story of when the promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled and changed everything. Before this happened, the apostles and disciples were hiding from the public for fear that what had happened to Jesus might also happen to them. But everything changed on Pentecost Day when the promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled, and all of them were filled with God’s presence and power to proclaim the Kingdom of God in different languages. All the hesitation that overwhelmed them was gone, and they were boldly living their lives to the fullest—no longer waiting on the sidelines.

At that time, there were devout Jews from every nation that had come to Jerusalem to celebrate The Feast of Weeks, and they witnessed this supernatural event—each hearing the disciples speak in their languages. Some wanted to know how that was possible, so they asked the apostles, “What does this mean?” Others made fun of them, saying, “They have had too much wine.” It was then that Peter stood and preached the Scriptures that explained who Jesus was and what he came to do. And when they heard everything Peter had said, their hearts were moved to believe and asked Peter, “What should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

This was the message that gave birth to the church: believe in Jesus, do what he says, and follow him. That day about three thousand persons were added to the faith of Jesus through the profession of faith and baptism. Through their confession and welcoming of God’s gift, they all were changed and started a new life journey with God.

An example of this transformation is the apostle Peter. Here, we see him not as a cowered disciple overwhelmed by guilt for denying Jesus and having no confidence in his capacity and skills but as a powerful and eloquent witness of Jesus. On the day of Pentecost, Peter stood before a crowd of the same people he once feared, yet he boldly declared the gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter was changed for good when the Spirit of God came to him.

But what does it mean to us now? What does having the Holy Spirit look like to us today? I remember when I was young and getting serious in my faith journey, some of my friends and relatives noticed I was changing. I guess the way I talked and behaved gave me away. So, they would ask me about it, and I would simply say that God was changing me. I was becoming more kind, more compassionate, and more confident about who I was. To me, having the Holy Spirit meant being transformed and having a new beginning in my life, loving and following Jesus.

I share this because maybe you have heard that you don’t have the Holy Spirit unless you speak in angelic tongues, have a supernatural power to heal or walk around with a halo over your head. You may have those things, but those are not the definitive proofs that the Spirit of God is with us.

Now you may be wondering, “What does it look like to have the Holy Spirit?” Or, “How can I tell if I am experiencing transformation?” then. Imagine waking up each morning with a renewed sense of purpose and a deep-set peace in your heart, regardless of your troubles. Think also of the softening of a hardened heart, the forgiveness offered where there was once bitterness, the newfound strength to break free from habits that were once shackles. Having the Spirit is living as God intended us to live one day at a time, pursuing the likeness of Jesus. If there is a sign of us having the Spirit of God in our lives that we can trust, is the one Jesus spoke of when he said,

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

Love is the sign that we have the Holy Spirit in our lives, the kind of love that brings us closer to God, that moves us to confess and repent our sins and seek to live in peace with one another. This is what happened to the people who listened to Peter preach after asking, “What should we do?” and Peter replied, “Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” This means that the new life we find in God comes to us when we call on Jesus and accept his invitation to follow him in the way of his love.

So, when we ask, “Do I have the Holy Spirit?” we are asking, “Do I believe in Jesus?” “Do I love God and my neighbor?” The only way we can have the Holy Spirit in our lives and experience the blessing of its presence is by giving our lives to Jesus and committing to learn from him to live as he did. And the Holy Spirit does not mess around; when it comes, it changes everything. It changed the disciples, Peter, and those who believed because of his testimony. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “I have come to make all things new.” (Revelation 21:5)

Do you want more of God in your life? Do you want more love, a renewed mind, and transformed life? I understand each of us may experience this journey of transformation differently. Maybe for you, transformation starts with a small act of kindness to a stranger or forgiving someone who has wronged you. Perhaps it involves setting aside time each day for prayer and meditation on God’s Word or stepping out of your comfort zone to serve in a new ministry. It could be letting go of old habits, healing from past hurts, or mending broken relationships. When we talk about new beginnings, that is what we mean: allowing ourselves to be led by Jesus’ teachings and the prompting of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

So, here is the invitation and good news: Today, on this day of Pentecost, let us open our hearts to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. Let it guide us to become better spouses, parents, friends, neighbors, and human beings. Let us courageously live our faith, as the apostles did, and trust that we are not alone. The Spirit of God is within us, empowering us to shine God’s light into our lives and communities. Let this be a day of transformation and new beginnings. Amen.