

PENTECOST 2017

The Rev'd. W. Gedge Gayle, Jr. 3rd Rector of St. Martin's Church

It is an honor to be with you all today as we join together two celebrations...
The **birthday of the Church** – The Day of Pentecost – when the gathering of about 120 anxious and bewildered believers (as Acts 1: 15 tells us) were suddenly caught up in an indescribable experience,
as the Holy Spirit comes pouring into their lives like a mighty wind and tongues of fire – a monumental and, as the Scripture tells us, an intoxicating phenomenon!

2. And the continuing observance of **the 75th Anniversary of St. Martin's Episcopal Church here in Metairie.**

Needless to say, our beginning here at St. Martin's Church was not quite as dramatic as the Pentecost event,

but it does add a touch of drama to put it into perspective...

Metairie Road had been paved in the 1920s, and a streetcar ran along it,

but in the 1940s, when this church came into being, most if not all of the side streets were surfaced with gravel or clamshell.

People still hunted ducks in the marshy ponds where Lakeside Shopping Center is today,

And in the flood of 1947, related to the near-miss of a hurricane, I was assured that one could launch a boat in the 200 block of Brockenbraugh Court, where my family & I lived for a while, and paddle right out into Lake Pontchartrain!

Thankfully, times have changed!

Some of you here today may not know that I served as Rector here for 27 ½ years, beginning December 1, 1976.

I was here so long that one in a while an outsider would ask if I was the founding pastor of the parish!

My response was always, *"Thanks for asking, but when St. Martin's Church was founded, I was 2 ½ years old!"*

TIME FLYS!!

So, we celebrate **two notable beginnings...and, YES, they are definitely connected. According to the Biblical record, the Holy Spirit (promised by Jesus after the Resurrection)**

comes ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST...

TO INFUSE

TO EMPOWER

AND TO UNITEthat gathering of Christian believers into the CHURCH...

THE BODY OF CHRIST...THE LIVING WITNESS TO THE RISEN LORD!

THE FOCUS OF THE BIBLICAL RECORD IS THE POWER and the EFFECT OF THE PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT:

One of the most significant learnings of my theological education was the fact that St. Paul referred to the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Christ *Interchangeably.*

In other words, the Holy Spirit is **not** a disconnected force or emotion

or expression of religious zeal...

IT HAS CONTENT! IT CONTAINS WITHIN, **ALL** THAT IS REPRESENTED IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST...

MANY SCHOLARS DESCRIBE THE HOLY SPIRIT AS
THE POWERFUL BOND OF **UNCONDITIONAL LOVE THAT EXISTS
BETWEEN
GOD THE FATHER/ CREATOR
AND GOD THE SON/ CHRIST & REDEEMER!**

THAT MEANS THE SPIRIT INCLUDES THE ACCEPTANCE
FORGIVENESS
LOVING KINDNESS
RECONCILIATION
AND HEALING POWER WE SEE IN THE
LIFE AND MINISTRY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST...
WITH THE EFFECT OF INFUSING & TRANSFORMING US,
LEADING US TO **WHOLENESS**...SHALOM IN THE HEBREW
...TO THE PEACE THAT PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING!!

THUS: to say that the Spirit comes to **INFUSE** us, is to acknowledge that it's presence IS ACCEPTED within us...to become a part *of who we really are*, and OF *what we are intended to be*.

St. Paul often spoke of being "IN CHRIST" and "CHRIST IN US,"
And we repeat that language in a number of places in the Prayer Book...

the INFUSION of the Holy Spirit is God's chief gift to us,...a powerful spiritual gift....God's deep & profound presence in our own being, INDIVIDUALLY, AND CORPORATELY AS WE GATHER IN CHRIST'S NAME FOR WORSHIP & SERVICE!

2. THE SPIRIT ALSO COMES TO EMPOWER US!

It is worth remembering that the disciples gathered on the Day of Pentecost were **not** magically delivered from the sources of their quite understandable fear and insecurity. There was still plenty of anxiety to go around!

There would be persecution/
there would be threats to their lives and their hopes for the future...

BUT NOW THEY WERE EMPOWERED!

The Holy Spirit, in a dramatic way, **encouraged them to GO ON!**

...The Spirit gave them the power to witness to their faith
to care for one another in this shared community,
to refuse to allow **fear** to govern them...

and in the power of the Holy Spirit,
THEY WERE SENT OUT BY THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST,
they went OUT to become **a gift to the whole world!**

And we still embody that gift; we are called to rejoice in it, and to share it with others!

3. IN LIKE MANNER, THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME TO UNITE US!

There had been prophets and spiritual leaders down through history, Heroes of the Hebrew Tradition that those who gathered on that Day of Pentecost shared (as far as we know, all 120 were Jews)...

GOD'S SPIRIT HAD BEEN WITH THOSE PROPHETS/ THOSE LEADERS FOR SPECIFIC TIMES AND FUNCTIONS...

But now it was the **WHOLE BODY**, THE GATHERED CHURCH, THAT WOULD WITNESS TO ALL THAT GOD, IN HIS LOVE AND POWER, HAD DONE FOR THEM.

THIS WAS, INDEED, SOME THING VERY NEW!

THE BIRTHDAY OF THE CHURCH

THE BODY OF CHRIST!

So the Holy Spirit comes to Infuse, to Empower and to Unite. **P**

I TRUST THAT YOU CAN SEE HOW Our Celebration of THE DAY OF PENTECOST

IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THIS PARISH CHURCH...

I. We who share the Christian community that is St. Martin's Church, need to be ***continually infused*** with the Spirit of Christ!

a. This is the chief goal of our worship together, in Word and Sacrament.

b. We need continual **empowerment:**

the force that encourages us to grow in our knowledge and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ...and perfect our discipleship in his name.

And most importantly, **to grow spiritually!**

(Remember: Our spiritual journey is a life-long enterprise...with many stops and starts, times of progress and excitement, and times of dryness and disappointment...

The Day of Pentecost comes to remind and reassure us that we can and **MUST** rely on God's Faithfulness,

For God never gives up on us even when we are living through times of fear & doubt & anxiety about the future.)

Finally, the Holy Spirit *comes to unite us:*
Our unity as Christian believers and our belonging in any Church community does not depend upon **uniformity...**

We will not all agree on every issue,
We will not all see ourselves and our world in the same way!

YET THERE IS A **UNITY** WE SHARE...OUR COMMON DESIRE FOR WHOLENESS...for God's Peace...

Something deeper than politics or social issues or even Church policy...
There is room in the Church for "all sorts & conditions of" humanity, as the liturgy reminds us...

This is true of any healthy parish church...and one of the strengths of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Tradition in my own experience.

Our unity is deeper than human opinion...or emotion!
And it is truly a gift of God's Holy Spirit,

For it can and will *overcome all obstacles* if we are patient and governed by loving-kindness...

and the reward for all this is **the Peace that passes all Understanding!**
So, again: Happy Birthday to the **Church,**

That wonderful gift of God to all people.

And Happy 75th Anniversary to St. Martin's Church, our shared community-in-Christ!

We have much to be thankful for in our past,
for the many faithful people who have gone before us,

And much to look forward to in the adventures ahead...with the continued
INFUSION.....EMPOWERMENT...AND UNITY,
Bestowed upon us by God's Holy Spirit!

In a very real sense, the words of Jesus in the Gospel apply to you & me,
especially on this day:

"Receive the Holy Spirit.

As the Father has sent me, ...so I send you."

AMEN