

Pentecost

1. The Greek word Pentecost means fifty. When the first reading tells us that the disciples were gathered on Pentecost, it means that they were observing the fiftieth day after Passover when the gathering-in of a spring harvest had begun. Now, fifty days later, this gathering-in is about to end. Thus originally Passover and Pentecost were agricultural celebrations. However, by the time of Jesus Pentecost had become an historical celebration commemorating God's giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, an event which firmed up Israel's identity as a chosen people.

2. But what happens now to this Jewish feast? To understand its new Christian meaning, we have to recall the story about the tower of Babel. It is in Genesis 11: 1-9

3. Therefore, it is clear what now happens. There is a reversal of the Babel story. Now people speaking different languages can understand each other. The world is once again made one. A new community has been born.

4. Our second reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians has the same message of unity or reunification, although Paul uses a different image, that of the human body, to get this message across. Just as the human body has many parts but is still one, so too we are all one despite our many differences, Paul tells the Corinthians. He wants to teach them that even though there are different roles and functions in the community, nevertheless all of them serve—or at least should serve—the unity of the whole, the body, which is the community or church there.

5. In today's Gospel the source which makes this new unity possible is identified. It is the peace and pardon which the risen Jesus extends to his disciples.

6. This unity has been preserved by our church since the beginning. Indeed, we experienced it here in the United States two weeks ago when the pope visited us. We all felt united with each other as Catholics because we all felt united to him. And that is just the way things should be because that is the pope's role and function in the church. He is to unite us all. A bishop has the same role and function on the diocesan level, and a pastor on the parochial level. And those of you who are parents have this same role and function in the family. You are to hold the family

together. And all these, pope, bishops, pastors and parents, can fulfill this role because of the peace and pardon which Jesus has given them.

7. Sisters and Brothers, let us live in this pardon and peace of the Lord each day. Let us carry out in our family and church lives the prayer which the Lord Jesus taught us and which we pray so often: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. It is difficult to forgive those who have offended us, but we can do so in the strength of the Holy Spirit whose love has been poured into our hearts.