

May 24, 2026 – Acts 2:1-21

Fifty days after Passover, the people of Israel celebrated another great feast. The Old Testament calls it the Feast of Weeks, because there were seven weeks between it and Passover. A week of weeks, so to speak. Later, by the Greek-speaking Jews, it came to be called Pentecost, which was derived from the Greek word for “fiftieth.”

It was a harvest festival. Which may sound strange to us. Who does a harvest festival in the spring? But you have to remember that Palestine has a year round growing season. The winter is mild, rainy, and good for grain, while the summer is hot, dry, and good for grapes, olives, and figs. So there was both an Autumn harvest and a Spring harvest to celebrate.

And so, at Pentecost, people brought before the Lord the firstfruits of the winter crops: wheat and barley. They thanked Him because He had caused the earth to produce food. He had sent the rains. He had warmed the ground with the sun. He had preserved the crops from destruction. He had given growth.

God made sure when he gave them this festival that Israel would always understand something, something that we often forget: A harvest is never merely the result of human labor. Yes, the farmer plows. He plants. He works. But he cannot make a single seed grow. He cannot command the rain. He cannot create life inside the grain. God alone gives the harvest. And so Israel gathered at Pentecost to confess this truth: every harvest comes from the Lord.

But on the Pentecost recorded in Acts chapter 2, God revealed that the Feast of Weeks had always pointed forward to something greater. Not merely a harvest of wheat. But a harvest of souls. And the parallels are striking.

In the Old Testament, Pentecost came fifty days after Passover. In the New Testament, the Spirit descends fifty days after Christ’s resurrection, after the true Passover Lamb had been sacrificed for the sins of the world. Just as Israel once celebrated the gathering of grain, now God begins gathering people into His kingdom from every nation under heaven. The old harvest festival becomes the beginning of the Church’s harvest.

The disciples are gathered together. Suddenly there's a sound like a mighty rushing wind. Tongues as of fire rest upon them. They begin speaking in other languages. Jews from all over the world hear the mighty works of God proclaimed in their own native tongues.

Throughout the Scriptures, wind and fire are signs of God's presence. The Lord who descended upon Sinai in fire now descends upon His Church. The Spirit who breathed life into Adam now fills his church with new life.

But the Holy Spirit doesn't come merely to create excitement or spectacle. He comes to create faith through the proclamation of Jesus crucified and risen from the dead. The Spirit isn't detached from the Word. He works through the Word. Through the words of the apostles. Through Peter's preaching. And the result is a harvest. Three thousand souls are gathered in a single day.

Think again about the Old Testament feast. Israel thanked God for causing grain to grow from the earth. At Pentecost, the Church gives thanks because God causes faith to grow in dead sinners. And that growth is every bit as miraculous as grain springing from the soil.

In fact, even more miraculous, in many ways. Because Scripture says we're not merely weak or sick by nature. We're dead in our trespasses. A farmer at least begins with fertile ground. But God begins with spiritually dead hearts, as hard as rock.

And yet the Spirit brings life. He plants the Gospel into human ears. He waters that seed through preaching. He nourishes it through Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And faith begins to grow.

The prophet Isaiah once compared the Word of God to rain falling upon the earth: *“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout... so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.”* Isaiah says God’s Word creates life just as rain creates a harvest.

Pentecost is the fulfillment of that promise. The Spirit falls like heavenly rain upon dry and lifeless fields. And the harvest begins.

Christians are often tempted to think of the Church primarily in human terms. We imagine that the growth of faith depends chiefly upon our cleverness. Our persuasiveness. Our energy. But Pentecost isn't about Peter's cleverness or Peter's persuasiveness or Peter's energy. Pentecost is about the Holy Spirit's miraculous work.

No farmer stands over a field and shouts grain into existence. So also no preacher can manufacture faith. No Christian can convert a soul simply by reasoning or charisma. The harvest belongs to the Lord. As St. Paul would say to the Corinthians, *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."*

Now, of course, the Church certainly labors. The seed must be scattered. The Gospel must be preached. Missionaries must go. Pastors must preach. Parents must catechize their children. Christians must confess Christ before the world.

But only the Spirit can give life. Only the Spirit can open deaf ears. Only the Spirit can create faith in Christ.

And that should both humble and comfort us. It humbles us because the harvest is not our achievement. The Church is not built by human genius. Faith is not the product of emotional manipulation or marketing strategy. Pentecost is not a celebration of human religion. It is a celebration of divine mercy.

But Pentecost also comforts us. Because if the harvest ultimately depends on God, then the Church's future doesn't rest on human strength. The same Spirit who gathered three thousand souls in Jerusalem is still at work today. And He still works the same way. He uses the same Means of Grace that He always has.

That's exactly what we see happening in Acts 2. Once you look past all the fire and wind and speaking in foreign languages, what do you have? The Spirit working through the preaching of the Word. People hearing the Gospel. Repenting. And then being baptized for the forgiveness of their sins.

Word and Sacrament, the same as we use today. That's how the Spirit gathers the harvest. That's how he's always gathered the harvest. That's how he always will gather the harvest. And so today, the Church continues to celebrate Pentecost not by seeking new revelations or new tongues of fire, but by rejoicing that the Spirit still comes through the means Christ established.

Every sermon that proclaims Christ crucified is Pentecost continuing. Every Baptism is Pentecost continuing. Every absolution is Pentecost continuing. Every Lord's Supper is Pentecost continuing. The Spirit is still creating a harvest. And you yourselves are evidence of it.

Because you were once spiritually barren ground. But the Gospel was planted into your ears. In Baptism the Spirit joined you to Christ's death and resurrection. Through the preached Word He continues to call you to repentance and faith. Through Christ's body and blood He strengthens and preserves you.

And slowly, fruit began to grow. Faith. Love. Patience. Endurance. Forgiveness. Hope. Maybe not quickly. Maybe not without struggle. But, in time, the Spirit has produced a harvest in you.

The prophet Joel promised it in the text Peter quotes today. God said, *"I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."* And that promise remains active even now. The Spirit continues to be poured out wherever Christ is preached. The harvest is still underway. And one day it will be complete.

The Feast of Weeks was a time of rejoicing after the harvest had been gathered in. In the same way, Pentecost points forward to the final harvest at the return of Christ. When every believer gathered by the Spirit through the Gospel will stand before the throne of the Lamb. When the fields will be fully reaped. And not one grain will be lost. And the Church will rejoice forever in the great harvest God Himself has given.

So today we give thanks. Just as ancient Israel thanked God for wheat and grain and daily bread, we thank Him for the far greater harvest He has produced through His Spirit. For faith. For forgiveness. For the Church. For Christ. And for the Spirit who still causes dead sinners to live. Amen.