



PENTECOST MEDITATION

You will note that this week we have a dove with the face of the sun on the bulletin cover. This is because the dove is a biblical symbol of the Holy Spirit.

At creation, the Spirit hovered, or fluttered, bird-like over the watery face of creation. After the flood-rains ceased in Noah's day, a dove hovered above the watery earth as dry land emerged once again. The dove returned to Noah with an olive branch, showing a new garden and new creation were being established. That dove symbolized the Spirit, preparing the world once again as a habitation for humanity. At the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended to the waters once again. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus in the form of a dove as he was baptized in the Jordan. Once again, the Spirit was ushering in a new creation in the form of a bird over the waters.

You will also note the pastor's red stole. Red is the color of Pentecost because the Spirit is associated with fire. The fire of God's altar, which consumed the sacrifices, was a sign of the Spirit. The Spirit descended upon the disciples in Acts 2 in tongues of fire. At Pentecost, we

should ask God to send his fire to dwell in us so that we might burn brightly with his love and light as living sacrifices.

Here are some notes on Pentecost in the church calendar compiled from various sources:

The day of Pentecost, the gift to the disciples of the Holy Spirit, is celebrated fifty days after Easter. It ends the Easter Season and begins the last season of the church's year, the Season of Pentecost. The Sundays of the season are numbered as "The Xth Sunday after Pentecost" *etc.* Trinity is a late feast dating from the 14th century and it was only in 1662 that Sundays were named after that feast ("The Xth Sunday after Trinity" *etc.*). Hangings and vestments on Pentecost are red, reflecting the idea of the Spirit as fire, the fire of Christ's love burning within us to sustain us and inspire us in our everyday lives.

The controlling reading at the Eucharist during the Pentecost season is the New Testament Reading (Epistle). Throughout the season the reading is concerned with showing the various aspects of the life of the people of God as they move forward in the power of the Spirit on their pilgrimage between Pentecost and Parousia (the end of time, the gathering up of all things). Although the length of the Pentecost season varies, the readings for the Last Sunday after Pentecost always follow the theme of "Citizens in Heaven". This makes a suitable end to the Church's Year, looking towards our own final pilgrimage.

Historically, many Christians have celebrated Pentecost in a way similar to Christmas and Easter. For example, a historical witness records King Arthur's celebration, reporting, "Arthur, the good King of Britain, whose prowess teaches us that we, too, should be brave and courteous, held a rich and royal court upon that precious feast day which is always known by the name of Pentecost." Because Pentecost commemorated the gifts of the law and the Spirit, and the Spirit's own gifts to the church as the body of Christ, Christians often gave gifts to one another. Because the Spirit created a new community (cf. Acts 2:42ff), Pentecost was a time for corporate feasting and rejoicing. Numerous hymns have been written for Pentecost. Pentecost is important because it reshapes our view of 'spirituality.' What most people mean by 'spirituality' today is simply idolatry. It is a privatized, interiorized religion they have created. But biblical Spirituality (note the capital 'S'!) means a life of service and love, driven by the Spirit's power and shaped by the Bible.

Pentecost is also significant because it brings the redemptive historical cycle of the church year to an end. Next Sunday is Trinity season, then comes a long period of "ordinary time" (no special days), usually referred to as the season of Pentecost, or the season of Trinity, or the season of the church. In this way, Pentecost celebrates the culmination of God's redeeming work in Christ. Pentecost is the sign that Christ is seated at God's right hand in heaven. The next "big event" on God's redemptive timetable is his final coming. The Spirit is given to us to sustain us in the 'time in between the times.'
