

Cut to the Heart

Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2

What We Found

Pentecost was not a surprise; it was scheduled. On the feast that Jewish tradition came to link with the giving of the Law at Sinai, God gave the Spirit, arriving as He arrived at Sinai, in fire and overwhelming sound. And we found the number hidden in plain sight: on the day the Law came, about three thousand fell after the golden calf (Exodus 32:28); on the day the Spirit came, about three thousand were baptized and lived (Acts 2:41). "The written code kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

We also found Babel running in reverse: at Babel one proud people was scattered into many tongues, and at Pentecost many tongues were gathered into one people. The Church was born universal, with Parthians, Romans, Egyptians, and Arabs among her first hearers, a preview of everywhere she was headed.

When the crowd was cut to the heart and asked what to do, Peter's answer was sacramental: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38), a promise "to you and to your children" (2:39). And we found the Church's first day already shaped like our Sunday: devoted to the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers (2:42), a pattern the Church recognizes as the skeleton of the Mass, present in seed from the beginning.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 271, on Pentecost (5th century)

St. Augustine preached that at Babel pride scattered one tongue into many, and at Pentecost humility gathered many tongues into one. The Church, speaking every language across the world, is herself the continuing miracle of Pentecost: whoever holds to her unity speaks, in a sense, in the tongues of all nations.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Justin Martyr, First Apology, 67 (2nd century)

Describing Sunday worship for the Roman emperor around AD 155, St. Justin lays out the sequence: the memoirs of the apostles and the prophets are read, the presider instructs, all rise for common prayers, then bread and wine are brought, thanks is given, and the gifts are distributed to all present. It is the pattern of Acts 2:42, and it is recognizably the Mass.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures (4th century)

St. Cyril taught the newly baptized that in baptism we truly die and are truly born again: we go down into the water bearing our sins and come up alive, having received the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, just as Peter promised at Pentecost. Acts 2:38 is not a figure of speech; it is what happened to you at the font.

Live It This Week

Go to Mass this week with Acts 2:42 written on a card or in your phone. Your one assignment: find all four marks. Note the moment the apostles' teaching is proclaimed, the moment the fellowship is visible, the moment the bread is broken, and the prayers you pray with the whole Church. Afterward, write one sentence: which of the four moved you most, and why? Bring your sentence next week.

Memory Verse

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42)

Before Next Session

Read Acts 3 and 4, once, in one sitting. Notice what the apostles have, what they lack, and what they refuse to stop doing.

Catechism References

CCC 731-732 (Pentecost) · CCC 1226-1227 (baptism from Pentecost onward) · CCC 1342 (faithful to the breaking of bread) · CCC 2624 (the first community at prayer)