Pentecost is the day which we celebrate the birthday of the church universal. On this day, God fulfilled His promise made to the people by sending the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church.

Pentecost is probably the 3rd most celebrated holiday on our Christian calendar, besides Christmas and Easter of course. It is also widely accepted as the birthday of the church. But all of these feast days (Christmas, Easter and now Pentecost) evolve around one thing – the Covenant of God.

**But who is this Holy Spirit,** or what is, some may ask? Is it a person, a ghost, or some form of a mystical spiritual presence? Why should we care or place our trust on something that we cannot even touch or see like we did with Jesus? Unlike the other two persons of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is probably the least talked about and the least known. But that does not take away any less of its power from the other two. All three members of the Holy Trinity work intricately with one another at any given time and at any given place.

In his book, the ***Forgotten God*,** the author Francis Chan described the Holy Spirit as the following . He said, the Holy Spirit is ***the counselor who teaches and reminds us of what we need to know and remember. The Holy Spirit is our comforter, our advisor, our encourager, and our strength. The Spirit guides us in the way that we should go. The Spirit also gives us the power to be God’s witnesses to the ends of the earth.[[1]](#footnote-1)***

The Holy Spirit gave people the courage and the ability to proclaim the good news to the people. As a result on the Day of Pentecost, there was a spiritual revival with more than 3,000 conversions of the pagan faiths or no faith at all. That’s phenomenal.

Come to think of it, the Holy Spirit is really no stranger to us. It has been around since the beginning of time before God created light and separated the water above and below. The Spirit was there when Ezekiel prophesied to the pile of dry bones and they became alive, symbolizing God’s unfailing hope and faithfulness upon the people, even how undeserving the people may be because of their sins or how spiritually lifeless and dead they may be. The Spirit was also there at the time of Jesus’s baptism, when He was baptized by John not by water but by the Holy Spirit.

In the same way, every time we gather to participate in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, as we will do later on in our worship, we proclaim the Spirit’s presence is among us in this world and in our daily lives. We lift up our prayers of concerns, joys and thanksgiving as the Holy Spirit hears our prayers, comforts us, and acts in accordance to God’s purpose and timing.

 **Spirit of Unity**

In the passage that we read earlier in Acts, theSpirit came as promised by Jesus as we read last week. Bear in mind that this group of early disciples and followers only knew each other for the past few years, although some were related as brother. Some, however, were still trying to get to know one another because some were Jews and some were Gentiles. Their native tongues might be different, raised in different cultures and customs, just like many of us today.

Incidentally, this Pentecostal event in *Acts* has often been contrasted with what took place as recorded in *Genesis* at the Tower of Babel. The people then were also gathered in one place as a unified people. They spoke a common language, worshiped the same God, shared a common dream, vision and hope for the future. But unfortunately, you know what else they have in common? Their ego, their human pride and hubris overshadowed God’s plan and purpose for humanity. That’s not what God had in mind when God unified the people together.

In the early days of the church, many followers of Jesus were being scattered because of their fear of persecution. In a way, this scattering movement promoted the growth and the spreading of the gospels among the early Christians, for both the Jews and the Gentiles. The Spirit of Pentecost brought a whole new meaning of unity to humanity. **Even though they might be scattered physically, they were however united spiritually. Unity is no longer defined by the language being spoken, the culture and background being raised up in, but instead we are all united by their common faith rooted in Christ as their chief cornerstone. They were “*One in All; and All in One*”**, **not by the works of human hands but by the true calling of the Spirit.**

However, not everything went as smoothly as they would like for the early church. They had their hands tied and didn’t know what they would do when there was this sudden surge of people coming from East and West, North and South proclaiming their faith and declaring their allegiance of the almighty God. There was a great deal of assimilating and acculturating with one another, creating a new ethos and way of getting along with one another.

In the same way, many of our churches today are also living in the Pentecostal moment, coming together in one place for worship, fellowship and prayer in the midst of their diversity. Together we paint a collage of God’s humanity and feast on God’s buffet of the bread and the wine.

Despite our differences, we proclaim that we worshiped the **same God** and celebrated the **same baptism,** broke the **same bread** and drank from the **same cup.** We embraced the **same fellowship with one another in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.**

As we read in our text earlier, the Holy Spirit was the catalyst that ignites the passion of those who profess their faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit empowered us with variety of gifts that we must share with one another. These gifts provided the common language in which we can communicate with one another. What gifts are we talking about? The Apostle Paul talked about these gifts, to the early church in Corith. These were the gifts of **Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, Healing, Prophecy, Discernment, Tongues,** and **Interpretation.** This by no means, was an exhaustive list of the many gifts that God has promised us through the Holy Spirit.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit is also working among us right now and right here at Homecrest. The Spirit is hovering and moving the neighborhood and in this community, as we worship, pray and celebrate God’s unity in the midst of our diversities. The young will see visions and the old will dream dreams.[[2]](#footnote-2)  The Spirit is constantly at work among us and there’s no sign of it stopping any time soon until Christ returns once again.

**The Holy Spirit acts as our mediator and our communicator that calls us and binds us all together.** Just as *there is one body and one Spirit, and that we were called to the one hope of our calling,one Lord, one faith, one baptism,one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all[[3]](#footnote-3).*

Furthermore, the Spirit gives us the boldness and confidence to proclaim God’s message of hope and salvation to others, just like those or the early church in Acts. When we are “filled with the Spirit”, we are given this surpassing ability to speak in the universal language of **LOVE** and **COMPASSION**. This LOVE language is interpreted through our actions towards others.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, many churches are experiencing a spiritual revival. Over the past few years, there has been a new initiative of church planting within the PC(USA). The focus is to plan for many of these new worshipping communities. A number of these new worshipping communities are right here in NYC focusing on new faith seeking Christians and new ways of being church. Not to say there’s anything wrong with the traditional worship, but the times have changed, the ways in which people experience God and relate their faith have also changed. Contrary to what many skeptics out there may claim that our churches are on the “endangered species” list, we do see **signs and glimmer of new hope and new possibilities in and around us.** We see **new expressions of faith,** especially among those whose voices have been silenced and marginalized. Many of those communities are growing and thriving.

These new Christians may not have been born and raised in a Christian home. Some even doubted the existence of God and rejected organized faith institution altogether. But somehow, someway, the Spirit has found them and spoken to them in a personal way. They tried running away from God, but yet, the power of the Spirit was too strong to be held back.

These “seeker” Christians may not sing the traditional hymns that the church may be accustomed to. They may not look as your typical Christians, or speak the same church lingo. They may meet at the local Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts instead of the church fellowship hall. But the same basement. But the same Spirit speaks to them just as it speaks to us in the same way. They still study the same bible, pray the same prayer, and worship the same God. Who’s to say that the church of tomorrow will be the same as the church of today or yesterday? It’s OK to be different. It’s OK to be odd. **Aren’t we all misfits in our society and communities searching for our belonging and true identity in Christ?**

The Holy Spirit **IS** God’s constant and faithful presence in our lives. **The Spirit challenges us to stand firm during uncertain and challenging times. It challenges us to cast out our nets with new possibilities, and to seek new and clear visions in a fuzzy world.**

As Francis Chan put it so well in his writing*, “****The Spirit led the first Christians to do unexplainable things, to live lives that didn’t make sense to the culture around them, and ultimately to spread the story of God’s grace around the world.****[[4]](#footnote-4)*

May we be so inspired to dream dreams today and to see visions of tomorrow. May the Spirit of God empower us to do great things that are beyond our human imaginations that we often limit ourselves in, for as Jesus told us that nothing is impossible with God.[[5]](#footnote-5) May we seek new boundaries to cross and new adventures to embark on while fulfilling God’s mission here on earth.

So, **Happy Birthday Church!!! The wind of the Spirit will keep fanning the flame and keep the fire burning!** Thanks be to God.In the name of God the Father,God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. Chan, Francis *Forgotten God*. P. 74-75 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Acts 2:17* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Ephesians 4:4-6* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Chan, Francis *Forgotten God P. 16* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Luke 1:37* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)