

✠ In the name of The Father, The Son, The Holy Spirit, One God, Amen. ✠

PENTECOST

MEMORY VERSE

"BUT YOU SHALL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU; AND YOU SHALL BE WITNESSES TO ME."

(ACTS 1:8)



Sunday School Servant's Objective: A lesson on the Holy Spirit. To use the story of Pentecost to make very real to every child the meaning of the article of the Orthodox Creed: "Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit," and to lead every heart to desire and seek the help of the Comforter. A main point is the strength with which those who received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost had for telling others about Our Lord and witnessing to His death, resurrection and ascension. The Holy Spirit, which we received in baptism, gives us the same power to talk to others about Jesus and this is something that, as Christians, we must do.

The Story: Acts 2: 1-42.

I. Introduction

Before ascending, Our Lord gave some work to His Apostles. What was it? Witnessing to Him in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Did they begin at once? No. Why? Because Our Lord left them that they were not ready yet. **"tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).** **"We commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4).**

II. The Promise

Before He left them, Our Lord promised that He would send Some One to take His place, an Unseen Friend, Teacher, Helper, and Comforter. On the night before Good Friday He had said: **"It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7).** **"I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, ... the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17).** On the day of Ascension He had said, **"you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5).** Who was this new Companion to be? God the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the Holy Trinity.

III. Waiting for the Promise

(a) Picture the upstairs room in Jerusalem, large enough to hold 120 people (acts 1:15), probably the **"large, furnished upper room" (Luke 22:12)** of the Last Supper and

the Easter appearances: perhaps the house of Mary, the mother of St Mark, where later we find Christians gathering (acts 12:12).

(b) Picture **the Christians** meeting together. Who were there? The Apostles; St Mary; the other women; Joseph of Arimathea; Nicodemus; Lazarus, Martha and Mary, walking there each day from their home in Bethany; our Lord's Brethren; perhaps the Centurion who guarded the Cross, and Simon the Cross-bearer. In little groups they arrive, till the room is quite full. Day after day they meet for prayer, and nothing special happens. Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Yet The Comforter does not come. Another whole week passes, and still their prayers are not answered.

(c) The tenth day is **the Feast of Pentecost**, the Jewish Harvest festival¹. At sunrise they go to the Temple for the festival services (Leviticus 23:15-22), the waving of the two large loaves before the Lord, the waving of the sacrifice of the two lambs. When this service is over, they return to their upper room for prayer.

IV. The Promise kept

(a) Picture the scene that Sunday morning: every one is **"sitting"**. Perhaps St Peter is speaking. **"Suddenly"** a strange sound. Is it a storm springing up? It sounds like **"the rushing of a mighty wind."** It seemed to draw nearer and nearer, till **"it filled the whole house where they were sitting."**

(b) Then comes a strange sight. The room seems full of flashes of light, like tongues of fire, distributing themselves above the heads of the Disciples.

(c) These outward signs are tokens of the coming of an Unseen Visitor. We must not give the kids the impression that the wind was the Holy Spirit or that the fire was the Holy Spirit. These were only outward signs:. But just as surely as God the Son ascended into Heaven on Ascension Day, so God the Holy Spirit descended from Heaven on Pentecost. But with this difference: God the Son wears a human body, and therefore all that were present could see Him ascend. God the Holy Spirit is a Spirit without a body, and therefore His coming was quite invisible.

(d) Be careful not to give the false impression that God the Holy Spirit came into the world for the first time on Pentecost. The Old Testament is full of His doings. The Orthodox Creed declares that: He **"spoke in the prophets."** However, previously His manifestations had been occasional and exceptional. Henceforth He would **"abide with you forever" (John 14:16).**

(e) A Strange Power. They all feel that some great change has taken place inside them. They all have **"love, Joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

¹ This festival is known as the Feast of Pentecost or the Feast of Harvest or the Feast of weeks. It, too, was held on the first day of the week, exactly fifty days after the Sabbath that proceeded the day of the Firstfruits. The feast showed the finished product that would come from the first sheaf presented at Firstfruits. During this festival, Israel was to bring a **"new grain offering" (Leviticus 23:16)** in the form of **"two wave loaves...baked with leaven" (23:17)**. This feast provides rich pictures of New Testament realities. Fifty days after the resurrection of Our Lord Jesus (our Firstfruit), **"when the day of Pentecost had fully come" (Acts 2:1)**, the Holy Spirit came to indwell believers. The grain offering that had been transformed into new loaves can symbolise the transformation that occurs in man because of the Holy Spirit. The two loaves can be a symbol of Jews and Gentiles in the early church knit together as one body by the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit is for all and it is our Job to let His power use us to tell all about Christ **"For there is no partiality with God." (Romans 2:11).**

gentleness, self-control." (Galatians 5:22). Which are known as the **fruits of the Spirit**. They become brave, and do not mind who knows that they are Christians. They become eager to go out and tell others about Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

(f) Speaking with tongues. Suddenly the Disciples find themselves speaking in other languages. The amazed Jews from all parts of the world **"heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marvelled, saying to one another, 'Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?'" (Acts 2:6-8).** By this it is very clear that through the Holy Spirit we are given the power to preach Christianity to all people.

This is one of the **gifts of the Spirit**. The other gifts include Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, Healing, Miracle performing, Prophecy, Discerning of spirits, Interpreting tongues.

From: Many Years with Peoples Questions III – HH Pope Shenouda

ABOUT ASKING FOR GIFTS

Question?

Why shouldn't we ask the Lord to give us supernatural gifts, such as speaking in tongues and healing the sick and performing miracles? Doesn't the apostle Paul say: "desire spiritual gifts"? (1 Cor. 14: 1) and "earnestly desire the best gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31).

Answer:

The fruits of the Spirit, are more important for you and more beneficial than the gifts of the Spirit. St. Paul also said about the fruits of the Spirit: *"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."* (Gal. 5:22-23).

These fruits are of advantage to your eternal life, which is why the apostle calls them 'the most excellent way', when he says: "earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way." (1 Cor. 12:31).

He explains how love is the first of the fruits of the Spirit, superior to speaking in the tongues of men or of angels, better than all knowledge or all mysteries, better than prophecy and better than faith which can move mountains. (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

He said that prophecies will cease, tongues will be stilled, and knowledge will pass away, but that love will remain, and that it is greater than faith and hope.

As for miracles, they do not necessarily redeem the soul. Many of those who have done miracles have perished, and likewise miracles have been attributed to Satan and his followers.

Look at what the Lord said in His Sermon on the Mount: *"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 'And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Matt. 7:22)*

This is quite a surprise! So these people turned out to be evildoers, and they perished, and the Lord refused to recognise them, in spite of the fact that they had driven out demons and prophesied, and attributed it all to the Lord's name!!

When the disciples rejoiced at the miracles they had been enabled to perform, the Lord told them not to do so.

The disciples *"returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your name. " But Jesus said to them: "do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:20)*

And when He was tempted by the Devil on the mountain, the Lord refused to perform miracles.

He refused to change stones into bread, and refused to throw Himself down from the high place to prove that the angels would bear Him up...- because the Lord didn't wish to perform miracles for pleasure, or for worldly glory. 'So when the Jews asked Him for a sign, He used to say to them: *"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."* (Matt. 12:39).

Thus Jesus led them to think about His cross, death and resurrection, rather than the spectacle of miracles or signs.

Wanting gifts, and wanting to perform miracles could be a war by which Satan attacks you and deceives you by gratifying your pride, and then leading you astray.

The Bible says about the Antichrist, the person who deceives, that he is a man of sin, a man doomed to destruction, that he will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God, and set himself up in

God's temple proclaiming himself to be God, that he will make many go astray, and lead them to apostasy... And it says that: *"The coming of the lawless one will be.. displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing."* (2 Thess. 2:3-10)

How easy it is for Satan to lead people astray by miracles, or to lead them to be proud, by deceiving them with false signs.

If Satan sees you as someone who likes visions and dreams, he can appear to you in false visions and dreams... And if he sees you as someone who is keen on casting out demons, he can come out of a person and go back in, and thus play around with you and deceive you into thinking that you are gifted in this kind of work. The Devil is capable of appearing in the form of an angel of light, as the Bible tells us. So if he sees you as someone who likes wonders and marvels, he can fight you from this aspect. You can find examples of this in the book "Paradise of the Monks".

The war of pride, however, can arise even with real miracles.

Look at St. Paul, a giant of a figure in the Church, and see how he says: *"And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure."*(2 Cor. 12:7). God must have considered that affliction was beneficial to Paul, and so did not agree to the Apostle's prayer to remove it from him.

So if even St. Paul himself was wary of these miracles, lest they should make him think too highly of himself, shouldn't you be wary too?!

"Do not be haughty but fear." (Rom. 11:20), as Paul says, though he goes on in fact to give you further advice which applies to all people in regard to spiritual gifts: *"not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."*(Rom. 12:3).

Why do you think more highly of yourself than you ought? Why do you ask for the performance of miracles, something which not even one of the saints, asked for? Why don't you concern yourself with the fruits of the Spirit rather than the gifts?

Is it not sometimes a war of pride that deceives you into asking for gifts? Verse *"desire spiritual gifts."* (1 Cor. 14:1) however, does not mean that you have to ask for them.

It means, rather, that you should make your heart worthy to be given them. God cannot give you miraculous powers unless you are humble, because only the humble person is properly cautious about miracles.

Humility does not demand, miracles but receives them with a feeling of not having deserved them, while accepting that the Lord in His wisdom must have performed them because He deemed it beneficial to His creation in some way.

John the Baptist was the greatest man ever born of woman, yet he wasn't famous for performing miracles, nor did he ask to perform them.

V. The Result

(a) Courage to witness. Compare St Peter on Good Friday, afraid to confess Christ in the Kitchen, denying his Master three times, because he dare not face a servant girl's question, with St Peter on Pentecost, confessing Christ before thousands in the very city where Jesus had been crucified only six weeks earlier.

(b) Success in witnessing. Picture the conscience-stricken cry of the people when they *"said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shaft we do?'"* (Acts 2:37). St Peter's answer, *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shaft receive the gift of the Holy Spirit:"* (Acts 2:38). Then we see the wondrous scene that, *"that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."* (Acts 2:41-42).

VI. Conclusion - Summary

We too are called to be witnesses: the witness of our Christian lifestyle as well as the witness of our lips (telling others about Christ). We need Courage and the right words, The Holy Spirit is the only One who can give us both. We must teach the kids to prayer daily to be able to live as Christians and to tell others about the beauty of Christ, having full

confidence that the Holy Spirit will protect them.