

*The Book of Acts or the Acts of the Apostles* is believed to have been written by the same author as the gospel of Luke: presumably Luke – a disciples who traveled and worked with the apostle Paul. For many years we've thought of Acts as the sequel to Luke's gospel, but recent scholarship sees it more as the second half of the gospel. This is important as it switches the resurrection of Jesus from the climax of the story to the middle point, with the end of the story being incomplete, written by the way that we – as the Church today – continue the story.

Acts tells the unfolding story of the beginning of the church, moving from the disciples following the resurrection, to the emergence of the church in Jerusalem around the Temple and then as it spread outwards towards the ends of the world of the Roman Empire. It begins with Peter and the other apostles, before switching to focus upon the work of Paul as he witnessed to the good news gospel of Jesus of Nazareth among the Gentile (or non-Jewish) peoples of the Roman Empire.

**PENTECOST** | The term Pentecost comes from the Greek Πεντηκοστή (Pentēkostē) meaning "fiftieth". It refers to the festival celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover, also known as the "Feast of Weeks" and the "Feast of 50 days" in rabbinic tradition.[

The Septuagint uses the term Pentēkostē to refer to the "Feast of Pentecost" only twice, in the deuterocanonical Book of Tobit and 2 Maccabees. The Septuagint writers also used the word in two other senses: to signify the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:10), an event which occurs every 50th year, and in several passages of chronology as an ordinal number.

In Judaism the Festival of Weeks (Hebrew: שבועות Shavuot) is a harvest festival that is celebrated seven weeks and one day after the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Deuteronomy 16:9 or seven weeks and one day after the Sabbath referred to in Leviticus 23:16.[10] The Festival of Weeks is also called the feast of Harvest in Exodus 23:16 and the day of first fruits in Numbers 28:26.[11] In Exodus 34:22 it is called the "firstfruits of the wheat harvest." [12] The date for the "Feast of Weeks" originally came the day after seven full weeks following the first harvest of grain. In Jewish tradition the fiftieth day was known as the Festival of Weeks. The actual mention of fifty days comes from Leviticus 23:16.

During the Hellenistic period, the ancient harvest festival also became a day of renewing the Noahic covenant, described in Genesis 9:8-17, which is established between God and "all flesh that is upon the earth". By this time, some Jews were already living in Diaspora. According to Acts 2:5-11 there were Jews from "every nation under heaven" in Jerusalem, possibly visiting the city as pilgrims during Pentecost. In particular the hoi epidemountes (οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες) are identified as "visitors" to Jerusalem from Rome. This group of visitors includes both Jews and "proselytes" (προσήλυτος, prosēlytos); sometimes translated as "converts to Judaism", proselyte referred to non-Jews who adhered fully to the Mosaic laws, including circumcision. The list of nations represented in the biblical text includes Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamia, Judaea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Cyrene, and those who were visiting from Rome. Scholars have speculated about a possible earlier literary source for the list of nations including an astrological list by Paul of Alexandria and various references to the Jewish diaspora by writers of the Second Temple era (particularly Philo of Alexandria).

After the destruction of the temple in 70 AD offerings could no longer be brought to the Temple and the focus of the festival shifted from agriculture to the giving of the law on Sinai. It became customary to gather at synagogue and read the Book of Ruth

May 31, 2020  
Pentecost

Acts 2:1-4, 43-47

New Revised Standard  
Version (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>When the day of PENTECOST had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>43</sup>Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup>All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup>they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup>Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with

glad and generous hearts,<sup>47</sup> praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

## 1 Corinthians 12:1-13

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. <sup>2</sup> You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. <sup>3</sup> Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

### QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- What part of today’s texts grab you?  
How do you struggle with seeing God at work in our world today?
  - How have you experienced the gift of diversity in unity as the body of Christ?...as positive? A challenge? A promise?
  - Pentecost is considered the birth•day of the Church. What does that mean to you? How are we invited to celebrate it?
  - What does that mean for us today – this feast about being together, gathered as a community, when we are dispersed in social distance because of the pandemic?
  - How are we called to be Church today – in this time of isolation, division, rage, fear and hope?

*law on Sinai. It became customary to gather at synagogue and read the Book of Ruth and Exodus Chapters 19 and 20. The term Pentecost appears in the Septuagint as one of names for the Festival of Weeks.*

**The Book of Corinthians** is believed to have been written by the Apostle Paul, probably during his stay in Ephesus, (53–57 ce) after his initial 18 month sojourn in Corinth (around 50 ce). Paul seems to have written this letter of pastoral advice after he received disconcerting news of the community in Corinth regarding jealousies, rivalry, and immoral behavior. In today’s selection Paul talks of what is essential: resurrection. In the Roman Empire there was belief in what we call “A Roman Imperial Eschatology” Meaning that providence had ordained and made it that the Romans ruled the known world and were led by Emperor Augustus. His reign was the fulfillment of a divine plan and prophecies, a new age inaugurated in him. This salvation through the emperor, who was then worshipped as a god, amounted to the present blessings of safety, health and wealth. Those who benefited from Roman rule (the haves, elites and right families) did so by divine will come into the world through the reign of Caesar.

Paul, in contrast associated salvation not with the coming of Caesar, but with the coming and the return of Christ. It’s in the resurrection of Jesus that a new age has begun, and the world has already changed even if this transformation is not yet complete. Recently found archaeological evidence suggests that in the first century of the common era, the whole of downtown Corinth was gradually realigned architecturally to form a huge, composite, splendid monument to the imperial family, with an altar to Julius Caesar in the center. (Ben Witherington III, *Community and Conflict in Corinth*. p. 297) and *Conflict in Corinth*. p. 304)