

WELCOMING IN CHRIST
Monthly Devotional Reflections
Anticipating the St. Paul's Anniversary Campaign

MAY 2018

Continuing the Season of Easter, the Ascension, and **Pentecost** with the gift of the Holy Spirit and the birthday of the church

St. Paul's focus upon music and the arts as expressions of faith

TEXT: Acts 2:1-8 *When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?"*

REFLECTIONS: Jerusalem—important international cross-roads, a busy city in the ancient world. Jerusalem—where Jesus faced persecution, betrayal, trial, brutal crucifixion, and death. Jerusalem where the garden tomb was opened on Easter morning and women were the first to encounter and announce the risen Christ. The bewildered disciples begin to learn again that they will receive power through the Holy Spirit and bear witness locally, regionally, and globally to God's love in Christ. Christ ascends into heaven. And on the day of Pentecost, a harvest festival set fifty days after Passover, the church is born. The disciples are gifted by the Holy Spirit, and they share eloquently with the crowds about the great things God has done. They speak in every language, and so they are heard and understood by citizens from across the known world. Yes, it is bizarre and powerful. The reaction: "Friends, what are we to do?" And the hearers are instructed to repent and be baptized. They are welcomed into the church.

PRAYERS: As we anticipate and experience the drama of Pentecost and the 60th birthday of St. Paul's Church, let us offer prayers of hope and thanksgiving on behalf of God's welcoming community in our church and across the world. Let us give thanks for musicians and artists at St. Paul's and for all who participate in beauty conveyed by a transcendent, universal language. We seek the blessings of the Holy Spirit to continue with all who practice, rehearse, create, perform, express, and embody faithful reflections of God's joyful creation.

Perplexing, Pentecostal God, you infuse us with your Spirit, urging us to vision and dream. Awaken our senses to your presence, and may it find voice in our lives, that our babbling may be transformed into discernment and the flickering of many tongues light an unquenchable fire of compassion and justice. Amen.



Ascension and Pentecost. Sculpture on copper, artist unknown 20th century. St. Joseph's Cathedral, Hanoi, Vietnam.

[from the Vanderbilt Divinity School Common Lectionary Resource]

ART: How are we surprised by artistic expressions and locations? How would you sing, sculpt, write, paint, dance, or otherwise express the Ascension of Christ and the day of Pentecost?

ACTION: Pentecost is only the beginning. It launches the ideal church with inspired leadership, excitement, joy, faithfulness, and growth. But we know how difficult it is to sustain the perfect community. We are encouraged, like the first disciples, to express the faith in every language (and not only with words) appealing to all our senses. Paul concludes an especially joyful letter to the church with some artistic guidelines for daily life: *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* (Philippians 4:8) Who invites you to express God's Good News in song, poetry, or paint? Thank someone who works to provide such excellent experiences. How might God, through the Holy Spirit, be inviting you to join the choir, lead a dance group, do art with children? How will expanded and well-considered new facilities enhance St. Paul's welcoming ministries? What are some new and effective ways of communication being enabled by the Holy Spirit today?

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