

Homily for Easter 6, 2021

Acts 10:44-48

'The Gentile Pentecost'

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TEXT - Acts 10:44-48

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, ⁴⁶for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' ⁴⁸So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

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INTRODUCTION

I dare say for most of you if I asked you to bring to mind the event in the Bible when the Holy Spirit was given,
You'd think of the day of Pentecost,
Which is a good thing to think.

When we hear the dramatic account of the Spirit's coming with a rushing wind,
tongues of fire on people's heads,
and the miracle of communication in other languages.

But actually, there are a number of events recorded in the book of Acts,
When the Holy Spirit falls on a person or group of people,
And each time something unique and significant going on.

Today the big emphasis,
,
Is that the Holy Spirit is given for the first time to Gentiles,
To non-Jewish people.

This event is often called,
The 'Gentile Pentecost'.

So let's have a closer look at this Gentile Pentecost today,

And we'll see...

First the **occasion** for it,
Second the **reaction** to it,
Third the **completion** of it,

And finally one **result** of it.

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OCCASION

So first the **occasion**.

We read that,

'While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.'

So, the *occasion* is that Peter is speaking,
Peter is preaching a sermon to be more specific,

But how did that happen and to whom and what was he saying?

Well, if you look back in Acts 10 you'll see that our text is the last scene of a quite dramatic story about a man named Cornelius.

Here's the outline.

Cornelius is a Roman Centurion,
A non-Jewish person, a Gentile,

But a devout man,
he prayed and he gave to the poor.

And it seems he had been drawn to the God of Israel in some measure,

God gives Cornelius a vision telling him there's a guy named Peter God wants Cornelius to meet.

Then quite separately from all this,
God also is working on Peter and gives him a vision.

You may remember this one,
It's the vision where Peter sees all sorts of animals coming down from heaven and is told to eat them.

Peter objects to this because as a faithful Jew he wasn't to eat unclean animals,

But Peter is told, *'what God has made clean, you must not call profane'*.

So then eventually the dots get connected and Peter ends up at Cornelius' house where he's also assembled other friends and family,
And they invite Peter to speak with them about what God has called him to do.

So Peter speaks to them about Christ.

He preaches especially the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus,
And that there is forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name.

And so it's **as** Peter is speaking **these** words,
To Cornelius and his family and friends,
All these Gentiles,

That the Holy Spirit falls upon them,
And they begin to speak in tongues and praise God,
which they see as evidence of the Holy Spirit's coming here.

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This is the occasion for the Gentile Pentecost,

And one of the points of application here for us,
Is to see the connection between the coming of the Spirit and the preached Word,

Especially the word about Jesus,
And even more specifically of his death and resurrection.

The Holy Spirit can come in extra-ordinary ways,
We see that in our text,

The Spirit at work through visions to Cornelius and Peter orchestrating the whole series of events,

Although notice something important here,
when it comes to these extraordinary moves of the Spirit in Acts,

people don't go looking for them,
but God takes the initiative to do these things.

There is the extra-ordinary,

But then our text also shows us the ordinary means of the Spirit's coming,
Where we do have the sure and certain promise.

If you want to be sure of the Holy Spirit's work in your life,

You don't go looking under rocks and behind trees...

You don't need simply wait in silence for the Spirit to come...

But you listen to the preaching of Christ,
And there we know for sure the Holy Spirit will be at work.

That's the **occasion** for the Gentile Pentecost,

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REACTION

Now what's the *reaction*?

Well, the reaction is *astonishment*.

⁴⁵*The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles...'*

And even Peter when it comes to baptising them (which we'll come to shortly),
Still seems a little reluctant, doesn't he?

'Can anyone withhold water for baptising these people?'

It's almost like he's saying,
Is this really happening?

They really have trouble with coming to terms with this,
that non-Jewish, uncircumcised,
Formerly unclean people,
with whom they had not even been permitted to eat,
let alone join in worship,

Are now receiving the very Spirit of the Lord,
and so clearly being welcomed in the people of God.

This astonishment continues right through the New Testament as the early Church tries to work out
how Gentile Christians relate to Jewish Christians.

We as modern people might be tempted to wonder why it took them so long to work this out,
Something which seems to us so fundamental to the Gospel.

One illustration to get into this mindset is to think about what it would be like,
If growing up there was a family across the street of whom your own family had always been very
suspicious,
Even been in conflict with, in certain ways,
Certainly, never interacted socially or anything like that,

And then one day you're back at home with your parents for Christmas lunch,
And they announced that they are adopting those other children of that other family,
And those children now call your parents mum and dad,
They share in everything of the family life,
Including the inheritance.

If we're honest,

For most people,
That would be hard to come to terms with.

And I didn't come up with that picture on my own,
It's basically the one Paul uses in Ephesians.

I've always been struck by how St Paul speaks in Ephesians about this,

He speaks about this great mystery revealed to him,
The mystery of Christ he even calls it,

And what is this great central mystery to the work of God in the world in Christ Jesus?

It's this, St Paul says,

*'that the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body,
and sharers in the promise of Christ Jesus through the Gospel' (Eph 3:6).*

This text today is perhaps the key moment for the Apostle Peter,
Where God teaches him what it truly means for God to show no partiality,
And that the Gospel really is for all people,

No matter who they are,
Or where they're from.

And thank God,
Because don't forget,
we're those Gentiles!

This text is about our Pentecost in a sense,
The moment God made clear people like us are welcomed into his family.

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COMPLETION

So we saw the **occasion** for the Gentile Pentecost,
Then the **reaction** to it,

Next is what I've called the completion of it,
And what I'm referring to here is baptism.

Then Peter said, ⁴⁷'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' ⁴⁸So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

If you were here last week you'll hear an echo of the question the Ethiopian Eunuch asked Phillip,
'Here is water. What is to prevent me from being baptised?'

One of the things our text shows us is the central importance of baptism as new people being joined to the family of God,
Even if they've already received the Holy Spirit, in some sense.

The book of Acts presents to us a wide variety of how, when and in what order the Spirit comes to people.

It's a reminder that we should be careful about ever boxing God in,
Jesus says, *'the Spirit blows where he wills...'* John 3

But as we survey these different events,
One thing that's clear is that the Spirit and baptism belong together.

So, at the end of Peter's original Pentecost sermon in Acts 2,
He says,
*'Repent and be baptised,
Every one of you,
And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'*

And by the way,
He goes onto say,
*'The promise is for you **and your children...**'*

Later on you have an event at Samaria.

There are some Samaritans,
Who were another problematic group they had to come to terms with,

They were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus,
But then the Apostles had to travel there and pray for them and lay hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit.

So again,
Although separated by time and circumstance,

The Apostles show us that baptism and the Holy Spirit belong together.

In our text notice, it's the other way around though!

The Spirit comes first,

But then Peter doesn't say,
'well now they'd had this incredible experience of the Spirit's coming,
I guess baptism is a bit redundant!'

Not he doesn't say anything like that,

baptism and the Spirit belong together,

So Peter says straight away they are to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ,

Which we understand as being Christian baptism as Jesus instituted it,
In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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This is very practical as we think about the Christian life.

For example,
if we are baptised as infants,
But then there is no active Christian life which prays for and with the Spirit,
Receives the Spirit through hearing the Word and receiving the body and blood of Jesus,
And bear the fruit of the Spirit in every day life,

Then something's gone wrong,
Because Baptism and the Spirit belong together.

But then on the other hand,
I've had a number of experiences as pastor where you meet people who are not yet baptised,
But when you talk about their life journey it's very evident that the Spirit has been at work in their
life,
Sometimes they've even been believers in some sense for a long time,

But have never been baptised.

So what do we say?

Here's water,
What's to prevent you from being baptised?

This is the completion.

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RESULT

Finally then, briefly,
Is the **result**.

Or at least **one** result of this Gentile Pentecost.

It's a little line at the end you can miss the significance of.

Then they invited him (Peter) to stay for several days.

The result of this,

Is hospitality and genuine community and relationships.

In other words,

It's not as if Peter experiences this extraordinary work of God,

Organises for them to be baptised and properly incorporated into the life of the Church,

And then gets out of there as quickly as he can wiping off the Gentile germs.

It's not as if he's rushing back to Jerusalem saying,

Gee that was weird and I hope God doesn't make a habit of that!

No the Spirit work on this occasion transforms these relationships.

Peter now stays with them,

Eats and drinks with them,

Shares life with them in real community.

And in fact when we read in the next chapter about Peter having to defend himself in Jerusalem,

It's **this** that they ask about!

Not, why did you baptise them?

But, why were you eating and drinking with them?

This is a radical change in the early Church,

In the ancient world generally.

I'm encouraged by this,

But also challenged by it.

Because,

Could it be that there are people in our Church...

For whom I can say,

'it's wonderful that God has given them his Holy Spirit and welcomed them into his family by grace,

But personally I don't want to have to sit down and talk with them,

Eat and drink with them,

Share life with them...

That might still be a bridge too far.'

Yet, that is what the Spirit of God has always done,

And that we pray is what he still does among us today.

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CONCLUSION

The Gentile Pentecost,

It's *occasion* was Peter's preaching of the life, death, resurrection and final judgment of Jesus Christ.

It's *reaction* was astonishment that God's grace had extended to these outsiders.

It's *completion* was Christian baptism, which always belong together with the coming of the Spirit.

And it's *result* was new relationships, new community, the sharing of real life together.

God grant it to us for Jesus' sake, Amen.