

Happy Birthday!

Happy Birthday!!!

Today is the birthday of the Church ...

... so where's the party? Where're the gifts? And the food? And the drink?

Well ... they're all right here!!!

Think about it.

At birthday parties, we have candles ... and fire ... and then each celebrant takes a deep breath ... and blows out the candles. And we wear festive clothes and eat rich foods and consume sweet drinks.

But at Pentecost, which means 50 days ... today being the 50th day after Easter Sunday ... it was Jesus who breathed the fire of the Holy Spirit – not on candles – but upon the apostles and the other disciples who were gathered in the Cenacle ... the same Upper Room where he gave the Last Supper.

Today's reading from *Acts* tells us that the Holy Spirit appeared as tongues of fire ...

So instead of putting out the flames with His breath, Jesus caused flames to appear ... flames that ignited the fires within the hearts of His followers, turning them from scared, cowering little mice, hiding out from the authorities, to lions who boldly proclaimed the Good News of Christ to all the known world ... in every language.

So ... our party has fire ... and breath ... and special clothing ... and plenty of candles ... but what about the rest?

Don't worry! There'll be plenty of food and drink ... right here on the altar as Jesus offers us Himself in the Holy Eucharist.

But ... "There's no party without presents!" Right?

"Where are the presents?"

That's why God sent us the Gifts of the Holy Spirit!!!

These are the gifts that allowed the apostles and other disciples to become so bold, and to successfully preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to sometimes hostile crowds ... in their own languages ... and which let us do the same today. These were simple folk who had no clue as to how much their lives were going to change by accepting these gifts!

These seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are:

WISDOM

UNDERSTANDING

COUNSEL also called **RIGHT JUDGMENT**

FORTITUDE or **COURAGE**

KNOWLEDGE

PIETY known also as **REVERENCE**

and

FEAR OF THE LORD or **WONDER AND AWE**

In his *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas described them this way:

WISDOM - With the gift of Wisdom, we see God at work in our own lives and in the world. For the wise person, the wonders of nature, historical events, and the ups and downs of our daily lives take on deeper meaning ... the matters of judgment about the truth, and being able to see the whole image of God ... and being able to see God in everyone ... and everything ... everywhere.

UNDERSTANDING - With the gift of Understanding, we know how we need to live as FOLLOWERS of Jesus Christ. A person with Understanding isn't confused by the conflicting messages in our secular culture about the right way to live. The gift of Understanding perfects our ability to see the truth. It's the gift from which self-evident principles are known.

COUNSEL (RIGHT JUDGMENT) - With the gift of Counsel or Right Judgment, we know the difference between right and wrong ... so that we can not just choose but choose to do what is right. A person with Right Judgment avoids sin and lives out the values taught by Jesus. Right Judgment is the gift of **TRUTH** that helps us to respond prudently, and to happily believe in Christ our Lord.

FORTITUDE (COURAGE) - With the gift of Fortitude or Courage, we overcome our fears and are willing to take risks as followers of Jesus Christ. A person with Courage is willing to stand up for what is right in the sight of God, even if it means accepting rejection, verbal abuse, or even physical harm or death. The gift of Courage gives us the firmness of mind that is required ... both in doing good ... and in standing up to evil.

KNOWLEDGE - With the gift of Knowledge, we understand the meaning of God's Revelation, especially as expressed in the life and words of Jesus Christ. A person with Knowledge is always learning more about the scriptures and tradition. The gift of knowledge is much more than the mere accumulation of facts.

PIETY (REVERENCE) - With the gift of Reverence, sometimes called Piety, we have a deep sense of respect for God and the Church. A person with Reverence recognizes our total reliance on God and comes before God with humility, trust, and love. Piety is the gift that leads us, at the Holy Spirit's urging, to worship God as our Father.

FEAR OF THE LORD (WONDER AND AWE) - With the gift of Fear of the Lord, we become aware of the glory and majesty of God. A person with Wonder and Awe knows that God is the perfection of all we desire: perfect knowledge, perfect goodness, perfect power, and perfect love. This gift is the fear of separating oneself from God, like a child's fear of offending his father, rather than a fear of punishment. This also leads us to know that God is all powerful. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom because it puts us in the correct place with respect to God: We are the finite, dependent creatures, and He is the infinite, all-powerful Creator.

So ... we now have our candles ... and fire ... and our festive clothing ...
and our gifts ... seven of them! ... and we've caught our breaths somewhat after
diving into the *Summa Theologica*.

Let's continue our special birthday celebration for the Church this evening
with the Eucharistic Feast which our Lord Jesus Christ has prepared for us.