

Pentecost – birthday of the Church

ACTS 2: 1-4: "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

After Easter Sunday, Christmas is the second-greatest feast in the liturgical calendar, but Pentecost Sunday is not far behind. Coming 50 days after Easter and 10 days after the Ascension of Our Lord, Pentecost marks the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. Pentecost is often called the birthday of the Catholic Church.

Christ acts through His Church

The Church was made manifest to the world on the day of Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit ushers in a new era in the "dispensation of the mystery" the age of the Church, during which Christ manifests, makes present, and communicates his work of salvation through the liturgy of His Church, "until he comes"; in this age of the Church, Christ now lives and acts in and with His Church, in a new way appropriate to this new age. He acts through the sacraments in what the common Tradition of the East and the West calls "the sacramental economy"; this is the communication (or "dispensation") of the fruits of Christ's Paschal mystery in the celebration of the Church's "sacramental" liturgy. [Catechism of the Catholic Church para 1076]

Pentecost Sunday is one of the most ancient feasts of the Church, celebrated early enough to be mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (20:16) and St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (16:8). It supplants the Jewish feast of Pentecost, which took place 50 days after the Passover and which celebrated the sealing of the Old Covenant on Mount Sinai.

When is Pentecost Sunday?

Pentecost is the 50th day after Easter (if we count both Easter and Pentecost). That means that it is a moveable feast – a feast whose date changes every year, based on the date of Easter in that year. The earliest possible date for Pentecost Sunday is May 10, the latest is June 13. This year Pentecost Sunday falls on May 15. On Pentecost Sunday, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles, they were granted the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Those gifts helped them to fulfil their mission to preach the Gospel to all persons. For us, too, those gifts – granted when we are infused with sanctifying grace, the life of God in our souls – help us to live a Christian life. The gifts are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. – Various Catholic sources

Novena to the Holy Spirit

THE novena in honour of the Holy Spirit is the oldest of all novenas since it was first made at the direction of Our Lord himself when he sent his Apostles back to Jerusalem to await the coming of the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost. It is still the only novena officially prescribed by the Catholic Church. A novena is a nine-day prayer recalling the time the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Apostles spent in prayer between Ascension Thursday (which falls on May 5) and Pentecost Sunday (May 15).

When Christ ascended into Heaven, He told His disciples that He would send His Holy Spirit, and so they prayed for the coming of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. Because of the connection between the original novena and Pentecost, this particular novena is very special. It is an expression of the desire of the faithful to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Most often prayed between Ascension and Pentecost, it can be prayed at any time of the year.

Praying the Nine-Day Novena

First Day: The prayer, verse and meditation for the first day of the Novena to the Holy Spirit remind us that we need the grace of the Holy Spirit in our souls to live as Christians. On this day, we prepare ourselves to ask for each of the gifts of the Holy Spirit over the next seven days.

Second Day: For the second day, the prayer, verse and meditation remind us that the **fear of the Lord**, the first of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, is the beginning of wisdom.

Third Day: Piety – the gift of the Holy Spirit for which we pray on the third day – is submission to all rightful authority (including respect for our ancestors) that flows from love of God.

Fourth Day: Courage is often used as another name for **fortitude**, but as we can see in the verse, prayer and meditation for the fourth day, fortitude is more than courage. It is also the strength to do what is necessary to live a holy life.

Fifth Day: On the fifth day, we ask for the gift of **knowledge** so that we may truly understand that the world is ordered towards God and we may be able to perceive His will for us.

Sixth Day: On the sixth day, our prayer, verse and meditation focus on the gift of **understanding** which helps us to grasp the meaning of the revealed truths of Christianity and to live our lives in accordance with those truths.

Seventh Day: Counsel, our meditation for the seventh day, is supernatural common sense. With this gift of the Holy Spirit, we can translate our faith into action in everything that we do.

Eighth Day: Our prayer, verse and meditation for the eighth day focus on **wisdom** – "the most perfect of the gifts" of the Holy Spirit. Wisdom shows that the Christian faith involves the head as much as the heart, and reason as much as the will.

Ninth Day: The gifts of the Holy Spirit that we've been praying for over the past seven days are supernatural graces. As we co-operate with those graces by performing acts of virtue, we grow in the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which reinforce our desire to do good. – Various Catholic sources

7 GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



• WISDOM • UNDERSTANDING • COUNSEL • FORTITUDE
• KNOWLEDGE • PIETY • FEAR OF THE LORD

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The Ascension tells us Jesus is alive in our midst



THE feast of the Ascension of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ commemorates the bodily Ascension of Jesus into heaven (mentioned in John, Mark and Acts) in the presence of His disciples 40 days after His Resurrection. We profess it in the Nicene Creed and Apostles' Creed. This year, it falls on May 5.

Not too long ago, Pope Francis answered seven questions on the Ascension.

1) Your Holiness, what is a good starting point for understanding the Ascension?

Answer: Let us start from the moment when Jesus decided to make his last pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

St Luke notes: "When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk 9:51).

While he was "going up" to the Holy City, where his own "exodus" from this life was to occur, Jesus already saw the destination, heaven, but he knew well that the way, which would lead him to the glory of the Father, passed through the Cross, through obedience to the divine design of love for mankind.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that: "The lifting up of Jesus on the cross signifies and announces his lifting up by His Ascension into heaven" (662).

2) What can we learn from this?

A: We too should be clear in our Christian life that entering the glory of God demands daily fidelity to his will, even when it demands sacrifice and sometimes requires us to change our plans.

The Ascension of Jesus actually happened on the Mount of Olives, close to the place where He had withdrawn to pray before the Passion in order to remain in deep union with the Father: once again we see that prayer gives us the grace to be faithful to God's plan.

3) How does Luke's Gospel describe the Ascension?

A: At the end of his Gospel, St Luke gives a very concise account of the event of the Ascension.

Jesus led His disciples "out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While He blessed them, He parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God" (Lk 24:50-53).

This is what St Luke says.

I would like to note two elements in the account.

4) What is the first point?

A: First of all, during the Ascension Jesus made the priestly gesture of blessing, and the disciples certainly expressed their faith with prostration, they knelt with bowed heads.

This is an important point: Jesus is the one eternal High Priest who with His Passion passed through death and the tomb and ascended into heaven. He is with God the Father where He intercedes forever in our favour (Heb 9:24).

As said in 1 John, He is our Advocate: How beautiful it is to hear this! When someone is summoned by the judge or is involved in legal proceedings, the first thing he does is to seek a lawyer to defend him.

We have One who always defends us, who defends us from the snares of the devil, who defends us from ourselves and from our sins!

Dear brothers and sisters, we have this Advocate; let us not be afraid to turn to Him to ask forgiveness, to ask for a blessing, to ask for mercy! He always pardons us, He is our Advocate: He always defends us! Don't forget this!

The Ascension of Jesus into heaven acquaints us with this deeply consoling reality on our journey: in Christ, true God and true man, our humanity was taken to God.

Christ opened the path to us. He is like a roped guide climbing a mountain up, on reaching the summit, pulls us up to Him and leads us to God.

If we entrust our lives to Him, if we let ourselves be guided by Him, we are certain to be in safe hands, in the hands of our Saviour, our Advocate.

5) What is the second point?

A: A second element: St Luke says that having seen Jesus ascending into heaven, the Apostles returned to Jerusalem "with great joy".

This seems to us a little odd. When we are separated from our relatives, from our friends, because of a definitive departure, and especially death, there is

usually a natural sadness in us since we will no longer see their face, no longer hear their voice, or enjoy their lives, their presence.

The Evangelist instead emphasises the profound joy of the Apostles.

But how could this be?

Precisely because, with the gaze of faith they understand that although He has been removed from their sight, Jesus stays with them forever, He does not abandon them and in the glory of the Father supports them, guides them and intercedes for them.

6) How does Luke's other book, Acts, record the Ascension?

A: St Luke recounts the event of the Ascension – at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles – to emphasise that this event is like the link of the chain that connects Jesus' earthly life to the life of the Church.

Here St Luke also speaks of the cloud that hid Jesus from the sight of the disciples, who stood gazing at him as he ascended to God (Acts 1:9-10).

Then two men in white robes appeared and asked them not to stand there looking up to heaven but to nourish their lives and their witness with the certainty that Jesus will come again in the same way in which they saw Him ascending into heaven (Acts 1:10-11).

This is the invitation to base our contemplation on Christ's lordship, to find in Him the strength to spread the Gospel and to witness to it in everyday life: contemplation and action are both necessary in our life as Christians.

7) What does the Ascension imply about Jesus' presence with us?

A: Dear brothers and sisters, the Ascension does not point to Jesus' absence, but tells us that He is alive in our midst in a new way.

He is no longer in a specific place in the world as He was before the Ascension. He is now in the lordship of God, present in every space and time, close to each one of us.

In our lives we are never alone: We have this Advocate who awaits us, who defends us.

We are never alone: The Crucified and Risen Lord guides us.

We have with us a multitude of brothers and sisters, who in silence and concealment, in their family life and at work, in their problems and hardships, in their joys and hopes, live faith daily and together with us bring the world the lordship of God's love, in the Risen Jesus Christ, ascended into Heaven, our own Advocate who pleads for us.

Read more at <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/jimmy-akin/7-things-pope-francis-wants-you-to-know-about-jesus-ascension/#ixzz24wvystgc>

What is the Rosary?

THE word rosary means 'crown of roses'. Our Lady has revealed to several people that each time they say a Hail Mary they are giving her a beautiful rose and that each complete Rosary makes her a crown of roses. The Holy Rosary is considered a perfect prayer because within it lies the awesome story of our salvation. We meditate the mysteries of joy, sorrow and the glory of Jesus and Mary. On Oct 16, 2002, St Pope John Paul II, with the Apostolic Letter Rosarium Virginis Mariae on the Most Holy Rosary, added five new mysteries to the Rosary – the Mysteries of Light.

The Rosary is a simple prayer, humble much like Mary. It's a prayer we can all say together with Mary, the Mother of God. With the Hail Mary we invite Mary to pray for us. Our Lady always grants our request. She joins her prayer to ours. Therefore, it becomes ever more useful because what Mary asks she always receives. Jesus can never say no to whatever His Mother asks for. In every apparition, the heavenly Mother has invited us to say the Rosary as a powerful weapon against evil, to bring us to true peace. It can seem a repetitive prayer but instead it is like two sweethearts who many times say to one another the words: "I love you."

The Rosary can bring about a deeply-moving experience for those who have learnt how to pray it well. Many of the great saints prayed the Rosary very often and the Rosary has been associated with countless miracles.

FIVE TIPS FOR PRAYING THE ROSARY



1 READ THE GOSPELS

Pope John Paul II called the Rosary "a compendium [synopsis] of the gospels". Your Rosary prayer and meditation will become more fruitful if you are familiar with the events that the 20 Mysteries of the Rosary represent.



2 ADD A VISUAL ELEMENT

Beautiful art can help inspire meditation. Find a work of art that appeals to you. Study and reflect on the image then pray the Rosary. Allow the repeated Hail Marys to bring you to a meditative state and recall the image as you pray.



3 ENLIST A PRAYER PARTNER

Ask a friend or family member to join you in praying the Rosary. Encourage each other and share your reflections, struggles and successes. You might also start to join the Rosary prayer group in your parish.



4 START WITH BABY STEPS

Try to focus on just one decade of the Rosary every day, setting a goal to pray each of the 20 decades in one month. It only takes about five minutes to pray one decade. Find a quiet place and really focus on the mystery.



5 LIGHT INSPIRATION

Still not sure about the Rosary? Consider this powerful quote by St Louis de Montfort: "If you say the Rosary faithfully until death, I do assure you that, in spite of the gravity of your sins, you shall receive a never-fading crown of glory."

Don't Let A Day Go By Without Utilising This Treasure, This Heaven-Sent Gift!

"Never will anyone who says his Rosary every day be led astray. This is a statement that I would gladly sign with my blood."

(St. Louis de Montfort)

Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Why we pray the Novena?

IN praying the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help (also known as Our Mother of Perpetual Help), we pay tribute to the Blessed Virgin Mary in asking for her assistance. This picture of the Blessed Mother with her Divine Son has helped provide strength, comfort and even miracles to the faithful for centuries!

Just as the Child Jesus fled into the arms of His Mother when He was frightened, so too do we flee into the arms of our Blessed Mother with child-like confidence whenever fear envelops our hearts. Just as the Virgin consoled and comforted her Divine Child, so too does she console and comfort us, her spiritual children, in our afflictions. We can always go to her in our time of need and receive her help.

When we pray the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, we are not choosing to worship her over her Divine Son. She is 'our Mother on the order of grace', according to a Vatican II document, and all the graces Mary gives us come directly from our Lord. She is always ready to intercede with Him on our behalf, but never for anything contrary to His wishes.

As long as we approach her as we do Him, with sincerely humble and contrite hearts, we can count on her aid and guidance. Mary's last spoken words in the Gospels concerned her Son when she said at the wedding feast at Cana: "Do whatever he tells You" (John 2:5). If we persevere in our intentions to do Christ's will for us, we are doing hers as well.

What is the meaning of the image?

The image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help is an icon. An icon is not simply an artistic representation. Once it is blessed, it becomes a window to heaven, a point of contact, "so that in praying before it, one is in the spiritual presence of the person represented". The icon depicts our Blessed Mother Mary, under the title "Mother of God", holding the Child Jesus.

Our Lady's Golden Crown that was placed on the icon by order of the Vatican in 1867 is one of the symbols of the many miracles performed by Our Lady while invoked under the title of "Our Lady of Perpetual Help".

The entire **Golden Background** is a symbol of Heaven, where both Jesus and Mary are now enthroned; this Light of Heaven radiates through both of their clothing; an indication of the heavenly joy they bring to human hearts.

Mary's Eyes are large to see our troubles and needs; they are always turned towards us. They also tenderly plead for us to avoid sin and remain faithful to and love her Son Jesus.

Our Lady's Mouth is tiny and silent for prayer, meditation and recollection.

The **Initials** on the right of Jesus' head are the Greek initials for 'Jesus Christ'.

The **Initials** above the **Angel on the right** are the Greek initials of St Gabriel the Archangel.

The angel on the right, **St Gabriel**, holds a cross and the nails, foreshadowing Christ's Passion and death.

The **Hands of the Angels** are covered in a veil much like that which the priest holds while blessing with the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance during Benediction.

The **Child Jesus** is depicted not as an infant, but as a 'miniature adult', signifying Christ's divinity and His humanity.

Jesus' Hands are turned downwards, a symbol of His placing the graces of redemption in her hands. These graces are available to any and to all who implore her for them through prayer.

Jesus' sandal falling from his foot is indicative of the haste with which he has run to her in fear, gazing at the angels who hold the instruments of His Passion and death. The loose sandal also represents Christ's divine nature, untied from the bounds of earth. The sandal that remains secure is symbolic of His human nature.

The **Child Jesus' Crown** was also placed on the original icon by the order of the Holy See in 1867.

The **Star** in the centre of Mary's veil is indicative that she is the "Star of the Sea" who bore the light of Christ into our darkened world. This star leads us to the safe port of Heaven.

The **Primary initials** on either side of Our Lady's crown are the Greek initials for "Mother of God"

The **Initials** above the **Angel on the left** are the Greek initials of St Michael the Archangel.

The angel on the left, **St Michael**, is depicted holding a lance and gall-sop, foreshadowing Christ's Passion and death.

Our Lady's **Blue Garment** is the colour worn by mothers in Palestine, symbolic that Mary is both Virgin and Mother.

Mary's **Red Tunic** underneath is the colour worn by virgins during time of Jesus.

Both Mary and Jesus' **Clothing** are colours of royalty.

Mary's Hands hold the child Jesus possessively and lovingly because she is His Mother. She, too, is our loving Mother. Her hand does not clutch the hands of Jesus tightly, but remains open, inviting us to her Son Jesus.



Why are Saturdays dedicated to Our Lady?

Saturday stands out as the day dedicated to the Virgin Mary. These days are designated as the memorials of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This memorial derives from Carolingian time (9th century), but the reasons for having chosen Saturday for its observance are unknown. While many explanations have been advanced to explain this choice, none is completely satisfactory from the point of view of the history of popular piety.

Prescinding from this historical origin, today the memorial rightly emphasises certain values "to which contemporary spirituality is more sensitive: it is a remembrance of the maternal example and discipleship of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who strengthened by faith and hope on that great Saturday on which our Lord lay in the tomb, was the only one of the disciples to hold vigil in expectation of the Lord's resurrection: it is a prelude and introduction to the celebration of Sunday, the weekly memorial of the Resurrection of Christ; it is a sign that the Virgin Mary is continuously present and operative in the life of the Church." - Various Catholic sources

Devotion, Honour & Love for Mary



DEVOTION TO MARY

MARY was called by God to be the Mother of Jesus the Redeemer, and she became not only the Mother of Jesus in His human form but also the Mother of God. So she is bound to Jesus, but also being human, she is united to us.

Jesus at the cross gave her to be the Mother of All Believers. By the grace of God, she surpasses all creatures as the perfect disciple and model of faith. And so we believe that she intercedes for us and we can confidently trust in her patronage.

Devotion to Mary has been a long tradition in the Catholic Church. The Church exhorts all the faithful, sacred ministers, religious and laity, to develop a personal and community devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, through the use of approved and recommended pious exercises. Although Mary's intercession is powerful, it is ultimately God who answers our prayers. We must be careful not to think that Mary herself or her icon have talisman-like powers in themselves.

It is our faith and trust in God that is most important. The traditional saying goes: "To Jesus through Mary." Mary is always leading us to Christ and the Church, including the many non-baptised persons who are drawn to her. As Mary is an example of faith, true devotion to her means we must try to imitate her example. A Marian devotion that does not lead to Christ cannot be authentically Catholic.

HONOUR FOR MARY

When God chose to redeem humankind by sending His Son on earth to be born of a woman, the woman He chose for this singular honour was Mary. The Vatican Council reminds us that at the message of the angel, Mary conceived and became the Mother of God, united to Christ "by a close and indissoluble tie". "As a result, she is also the favourite daughter of the Father and temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace, she far surpasses all other creatures both in heaven and earth."

This is the fundamental reason why the Church down the ages has honoured Mary, Christ is the only Redeemer, the only Saviour of humankind; but in God's plan Mary, a creature like us, co-operated in that redemption in a unique and intimate way. All the titles bestowed on Mary, and all the doctrines about her privileges and graces, stem from this. This is fundamentally why we should honour her still.

The Gospel of St Luke records Mary's reaction to God's call, how she reached out beyond herself and her natural limitation to accept God's word and submit to Him. She courageously surrendered to Him and by that surrender enabled Him to do great things for her and through her.

We too are called to believe, to trust and to put ourselves in God's hands. We all know how hard it is to do that. We lack courage, we give with reservations and we are worried by doubts, but not Mary. She not only gave herself to God but she never retracted that offering. There was no change of mind, no rationalising doubts about her vocation when sorrow and difficulty came, no turning back.

LOVE FOR OUR LADY

Any reader of the Gospel can see the intimacy of the son and mother relationship between Jesus and Mary. If He is the ideal man, then He must have been the ideal son. If He was the ideal Son, then He must have loved His mother with a love that was warm and deep and true.

Being a Christian means being a person "conformed to the image of Christ"; having a Christ-like personality, having His values, loving as He loved. The closer our conformity, the more intimate our union with Christ, the better Christians we will be. But how can we claim to be conformed to His image unless like Him we have a love for Mary that is genuine and filial, a love we express by our words and deeds.