

Mary, Mother of the Church
Pentecost (B)
(Acts 2:1-11)

Pentecost is the birthday of the Catholic Church. The Church existed since the Resurrection, but hidden behind closed doors and shuttered windows. During this time Christ formed and strengthened the disciples, putting into place the pieces necessary for the apostles to take up their role in the world. During this time the Church devoted herself to prayer and Scripture. The womb of the Church was the same upper room where the last supper took place, and at the time of her birth, she numbered about 120 disciples. Prominent among these was Mary, the mother of Jesus (Acts 1:13-15).

On a child's birthday the baby comes into the world and is seen publicly for the first time. This is what happened on Pentecost: the Church was seen publicly for the first time. There was something unique and supernatural about the Church, manifested in a miraculous way on "day 1" and continually present ever since: the Church of Christ is *Catholic*. That is to say, she is universal, speaking all tongues.

Jews converged on Jerusalem from all parts of the world during the great festivals, especially Passover and Pentecost/Weeks in the Spring, and Tabernacles/Day of Atonement in the Fall. The crowd which gathered was amazed and bewildered to hear the Galileans speaking their native languages, which surprised the Galileans more than anyone since they were only speaking *their* native language (Acts 2:5-8). Three thousand were baptized that day (Acts 2:41).

For 2000 years, the significance of this miracle has never diminished. When the Catholic Church began it brought into the world something not seen since the Tower of Babel in human pre-history (Gn 11:1-9), nor duplicated anywhere though many have tried. The Catholic Church was, and remains, the only example of the universal brotherhood of man, the only place where language and cultural identity do not divide and separate. In the Catholic Church alone, that which divides and fragments the human family is overcome. The Catholic Church is the restoration of the human family under one headship, the unity of brethren with each other by means of something higher than any human principle or power.

The human family, fragmented and scattered due to sin, is gathered together¹ in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to be God's family. But it is not just a superficial "gathering" on a human level, an "organizational" reality, the Church is formed through actual rebirth: the members are literally born again into their new divine family. Whereas their first natural birth gave them their human, earthly, cultural, and linguistic identity, their supernatural rebirth by water and the Holy

¹ "Church" means "assembly," "gathering"

Spirit give them their divine, heavenly, *Catholic* identity. The Church is one nation, comprised of one people, professing one faith, breathing one Spirit, speaking one divine Word.

The Church is the one family of God, where all the members are “brethren” of Christ, true brothers and sisters to each other. We have one Father, “our Father who art in heaven.” And we have a mother.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is our mother, which stands to reason if we are the brethren of Christ. Christ made this explicit on the Cross when he gave Mary as mother to the beloved disciple (Jn 19:26-27). St. John again reiterates this special role of Mary in the Church when he describes the great battle that rages between the Church and her demonic enemies (Rv 12:1-17). Mary has other offspring besides Jesus, namely “those who bear testimony to Jesus” (Rv 12:17).

Thus it is significant that as the Church prepares to be born at Pentecost, Mary is there with the disciples. What has already taken place in and through her with the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38) and Nativity, will now take place on another level in and through the Church. That is to say, the Holy Spirit will “overshadow her” (Mary at the Annunciation, the Church at Pentecost), Christ will dwell within her, becoming “flesh” in her (in Mary’s womb as a human baby, in the heart of the Church as Sacrament), and from her he will be born and given to the world (Jesus is born in Bethlehem at Christmas and present to the Magi in the Epiphany by Mary; the Church is born in Jerusalem at Pentecost and Christ is presented to all nations by the preaching of the Apostles).

What happened first with Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (the Son of God came into the world), now happens with the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit (the Son of God comes into the world). Mary is the perfect image and model of the Church. And Mary continues to fulfill in the Church, the same role she fulfilled with Christ in the Incarnation: she is the virgin Mother.

Thus it is that Mary *always* gathers with the Church in every age. As she did with the nascent church in the Upper Room, the first Catholic parish of 120 disciples,² she gathers with every Catholic parish every time it assembles for worship. Every Mass is Pentecost Sunday, when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon believers, and the Church goes forth into the world, sent by the Holy Spirit. One will always be reminded of Mary’s presence among the disciples when entering a Catholic Church. Look up, there is her statue or holy image, ever present reminder that the Church is *always and every time* the assembly of

² The upper room did indeed become the first Christian parish Church in Jerusalem, and remained so for centuries. James the brother of the Lord was its first pastor, he was the first bishop of Jerusalem.

“apostles, holy women, with Mary the mother of Jesus, and all his brethren” (Acts 1:13-14).

Mary prays with the Church and fulfills her maternal role in every generation. She helps the Church to evangelize, bringing Christ into the world by bringing him to birth in people’s lives. The miraculous conversion of 3000 on Pentecost Sunday did not happen, we can be sure, without her intercession. Likewise, the evangelization of nations has not happened without her prayer and presence. The fact that she is the heavenly patroness of so many countries including our own, and patroness of so many parishes, is testimony to this.

Among all the Pentecostal events of the Church’s history, one stands out in a special way, the evangelization of the New World by Our Lady of Guadalupe. Within 10 years of her apparition to Juan Diego in 1531, in which she declared, *“Am I not here who am your mother,”* not 3,000 but over 10,000,000 were baptized! Mary’s maternal role in the Church is that of Pentecostal evangelization. Working with her beloved clergy, the successors of the apostles, and by means of her own privileged relationship with God the Holy Spirit, she brings Christ to her other children, and brings her other children to Christ.

As we celebrate today the birthday of the Church, and the special role of Mary Mother of the Church, may she continue to help us today fulfill our Pentecostal mission of evangelization.