

Sunday, May 24, 2026

The Day of Pentecost

Procession and Solemn Eucharist

11:00 am

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae

on

John 20:19-23

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One Spirit, Many Voices

Pentecost is often called the birthday of the Church. Yet before it became a feast day marked on the Church calendar, Pentecost was first an experience—an overwhelming encounter with the Holy Spirit. In today's Gospel, the risen Jesus enters a room filled with fear and uncertainty. The disciples have locked the doors. Their hearts are closed by grief and anxiety. Yet Jesus comes among them and says, "Peace be with you." Then He breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

That breath matters. In Scripture, breath is never merely air. It is life itself. In Genesis, God breathed into Adam the breath of life. And now the risen Christ breathes upon His disciples a new creation—the birth of a Spirit-filled community.

Then, in the Book of Acts, that same Holy Spirit descends like wind and fire at Pentecost. And something extraordinary happens: people from every nation hear the mighty works of God proclaimed in their own languages. The miracle of Pentecost is not that everyone suddenly speaks one single language. The miracle is that every language is heard, honored, and gathered into communion.

As I walk along Fifth Avenue, I hear languages other than English more often than I hear English itself. Always bustling with tourists, Fifth Avenue is one of the great crossroads of the world. Day after day, I encounter people from countless nations and cultures. And as I walk there, I experience a kind of freedom—a freedom I could never quite feel back in Korea.

Although Korea today has become far more international, when I lived there twenty years ago, foreigners were still relatively rare. It was a society deeply shaped by conformity and homogeneity. People often resembled one another not only in appearance but even in the way they dressed and behaved. To reveal one's individuality required courage. In my twenties, longing to escape that atmosphere, I became something of a rebel—a young woman walking around in purple-tinted glasses.

Over time, I came to realize something profound: just as a forest rich with diverse plants and animals is a healthy forest, and just as a person with a rich and varied microbiome is healthier, human communities, too, become richer and stronger when different people, cultures, languages, and perspectives are welcomed and allowed to flourish. Diversity is not a threat to life; diversity is part of the very design of life itself.

God created the world in infinite diversity. No two flowers, no two dolphin faces, and no two human fingerprints are exactly alike. And the work of the Holy Spirit reflects that same divine creativity.

Saint Paul tells us in First Corinthians that there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. To one is given wisdom; to another, knowledge; to another, faith; to another, healing; to another, prophecy; to another, discernment; to another, tongues and interpretation. The Spirit does not erase difference. The Spirit creates harmony through difference.

The pursuit of diversity for the common good is therefore not merely a social ideal; it is also a spiritual reality. It is evidence of the active presence of the Holy Spirit. Any society shaped by Christian values must resist the temptation to fear, diminish, or erase diversity, because diversity belongs to God's created order and to the very way the Holy Spirit works among us.

The history of the Church itself began with this truth. The Church was born not in uniformity but in multilingual praise. And the fact that the Church still exists today, in 2026, is itself testimony that the Holy Spirit remains alive and active among us.

We must pay close attention to where the Spirit is leading us—within this community, this society, and this world. The Spirit leads not toward hatred but toward love; not toward division but toward reconciliation; not toward fear but toward peace.

This is one reason I cherish the Anglican tradition so deeply. The worldwide Anglican Communion is not among the largest Christian bodies. Outside of England, Anglicans or Episcopalians often find themselves explaining how we differ from Roman Catholics or from other Protestant traditions. Yet the Anglican Communion carries a remarkable motto: "Unity in Diversity."

That motto is not easy to live out. Some communities sacrifice diversity in the name of unity. Others sacrifice unity in the name of diversity. But the Anglican tradition continues the difficult and holy work of holding both together. And that difficult balance is itself the work of the Holy Spirit.

Unity among people who are already alike is not especially remarkable. It is expected. But unity among people who are profoundly different—that is miraculous. The greater the diversity, the clearer it becomes that such unity is not merely human achievement. It is the work of God.

And so here we are, gathered at St. Thomas Church on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, perhaps one of the most internationally diverse avenues in the world. We are called to embody this Pentecost vision—to reveal the beauty of unity amidst diversity.

Through livestreams and online worship, this community extends far beyond these walls. People from Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas join together as one Body of Christ. And the very existence of this vast and diverse body bears witness to what Saint Paul declares today: "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."

The Spirit still blows through locked rooms.

The Spirit still breaks down walls of fear.

The Spirit still teaches strangers to call one another sisters and brothers.

The Spirit still gathers people who speak different languages, carry different histories, and see the world through different eyes—and forms them into one Body in Christ.

The same Holy Spirit whom the risen Jesus breathed upon His disciples is with us now. The same Holy Spirit who descended like tongues of fire upon the believers at Pentecost is with us now. The same Holy Spirit who empowered Galileans to proclaim God's mighty works in many languages is with us now.

And that Holy Spirit continues to call us—to become a people who reveal God's unity amidst diversity; a people who choose love over hatred, reconciliation over division, and peace over fear.

Come, Holy Spirit.

Breathe upon us again.

Open our locked hearts.

Drive out our fear.

Teach us to recognize Your image in one another.

And make us one body in Christ,
through the beautiful diversity of Your gifts.
