

**May 19, 2024 - Pentecost Sunday**

**“Is it a Coincidence or Divine Intervention?”**

**by Pastor Julio Romero**

**First Reading: Acts 2:1-21**

The celebration of Pentecost Sunday announces the transition from a busy period in the life of the church into a slow period with the arrival of the summer season.

Very soon in the life of congregations there will be no more meetings, no Sunday School, no more weekly Bible Study sessions, and so forth. Our minds here in the church will shift to a less active ministry and to looking forward to the warm weather and more sunny days.

This is quite a contrast to what the Day of Pentecost meant for the disciples. As we heard in the Book of Acts, it was the day when the work of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ began.

It started with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the minds and hearts of the disciples. It was quite an event: there was wind, there was light in the form of flames, there were miracles, the disciples began speaking in different languages, foreign languages, there was preaching, teaching and prophesy.

The disciple Peter, in a bold act, addressed the crowd that had witnessed the display of divine power that clothed the disciples with abilities that bewildered everyone. Those people had no way to explain what they were witnessing. Native Galileans speaking in different languages? “That is unbelievable!” they said.

And so the work of the church of Christ began, and didn’t stop and won’t stop.

The significance of Pentecost is quite remarkable. It marked a turning point in the course of humanity: from that day on, the whole world would hear about the Son of God, know His story, His Gospel, and the gift of Eternal Life in Jesus.

God set things in motion on Pentecost; the plan of action was laid out right before the eyes and ears of those who had come from all parts of the ancient world to celebrate Pentecost.

God wanted them to hear the Good News, the story of Jesus. God wanted His church to proclaim that Good News to people of all nations. All that happened on that day was part of the plan of salvation that God has prepared for us.

Pentecost Day was a strong link in the chain of events in the history of God and humanity, a course that eventually will end with the time of Jesus' return and the beginning of a new earth, a new heaven, a new creation.

Those disciples and those foreigners who converged, who came together in the city of Jerusalem on the day the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the followers of Jesus was not an accident. It was not a coincidence that they all happened to be at the right place at the right time.

Humanity is on a course not decided by any of us but by God. God has a plan, and nothing will get in the way of those plans. And somehow, we all are part of that plan, we all have a role, we all have something to contribute to the fulfillment of God's plans.

Remember that we live in in-between times, between the time of the Lord Jesus' Ascension and the time of his return, but the absence of Jesus' physical presence in in-between times doesn't mean we have been cut off from the presence of God in the world.

The Holy Spirit is still and will always be guiding God's church, its mission, its purpose, which is to do the work of God in the world, something we cannot do alone. It is for this that the Holy Spirit came to us.

And in the same way that the Holy Spirit builds and guides Jesus' church, so it does with those who believe in Jesus. We experience God's providence through the Holy Spirit in ways that leaves us to wonder if what happens to us is mere coincidence, an accident, an isolated event, circumstance or it is the hand of God working in us.

Once upon a time an unexpected severe rainstorm erupted. Joan, looking from the second story of her home, could see stalled cars caught in the flash flood. A lone station wagon struggled through the water and headed up her street. The vehicle stopped for a moment in front of her house, then pulled into the driveway. Joan raced to the door and saw two teenage girls standing there. They were extremely frightened by the lightning, rain, and flooded roads.

One girl asked to use Joan's telephone, explaining that she wanted to call her father to let him know she was safe. Of course, the woman let them in and prepared hot cocoa while the girls made their calls.

Meanwhile, Edgar, the woman's husband, paced the kitchen floor nervously. The newspaper office where he worked was flooding, and he was waiting to hear from the facility manager. His anxiety was increasing because the man had not called.

The girls completed their calls and told the woman and her husband, *"My dad told us to wait out the storm here, but he was a little worried about our being in a stranger's house. I gave him your number. I hope that was okay."*

As Joan nodded, the phone rang. Edgar answered it and returned after a few seconds.

*"It was the facility manager, but he didn't want to talk about the newspaper office."* A strange look came over the man's face. *"He wanted to thank me for keeping his daughter and her friend safe!"*

After listening to this story, we can ask, "Was it mere coincidence or the work of the Holy Spirit known as divine providence that the two teenage girls randomly selected a house in which they would be safely sheltered?"

How many personal stories do you have in which you, yourself have asked the same question? Was it mere coincidence or the work of the Holy Spirit working in you?

For some, a coincidence is a divine mysterious way of remaining anonymous. For others, a coincidence is just a question meeting an answer in an unexpected way.

The story of Pentecost tells us that the ability the disciples had to speak in different languages was not an accident, a coincidence that they all had that gift at the same time and that there were other people who happened to understand those languages to witness it. We know that it took place in a very strange and mysterious way, but that is the way God seems to operate in this world, isn't it?

We live in in-between times, the time between Jesus' Ascension to heaven and the time of His return, but we are not without God, without the work of His hand in the world and in our own lives. We know this because we see His wonders around us, in His community of disciples, the church, and in every corner of God's creation.

**Amen.**