

# REVERSE BIRTHDAY

Today's celebration of Pentecost is in many ways a celebration of the birthday of the church. We look back to one day over 2000 years ago and say, not inaccurately, that the church was born. Jesus' promised Holy Spirit comes to dwell in the Apostles, which begins the formation of the church throughout the centuries. But as often happens in the life of faith, if we take a deeper look at Pentecost we might see conventional wisdom turned upside down. We might see that although Pentecost is a birthday, it is more like a reverse birthday. For today on Pentecost, the church doesn't look back so much to the day it was born, as it looks forward to each day it is reborn. And instead of gathering gifts on its birthday, it constantly gives them away. If we can learn to reverse the arrows of our own birthdays in this way, we may find it brings us many blessings.

What do you remember from the day of your birth? Precisely nothing, though at least we know the date and perhaps the time. We know even less about the birth of the church. The date of this birth changes every year along with Easter. The birth itself is described as miraculous, with the spirit coming in wind and flames. We don't even know who was precisely born on this day. The Spirit descended not just on the 12 apostles, but to all the people gathered, at least 120 and as many as 500. Here is a birthday where we don't know the day, what happened and who exactly was born.

Perhaps we know so little about the church, so little about our own births, because birthdays aren't buried someplace in the past. Birthdays are an ongoing, everyday miracle, that everyday new life is granted to us. After the miraculous events of Pentecost, the scriptures take pains to show that birth in the Spirit continues; Philip soon baptizes the Ethiopian Eunuch, followed by the great Apostle Paul's own rebirth. The church is then born into the four corners of the world, including Armenia, where Thaddeus and Bartholomew, then the Voskeants, then Gregory, then Hripsime, then King Drtad are given birth in the Spirit-and on through the ages. And perhaps most astonishingly, the church has been born here at St. Hagop Church in Pinellas Park, FL in the course of our own lifetimes.

It is fitting then that we recall few details of the church's birthday, just as we recall few details from our own. For celebrating the one day in the past when we came to life, pales in comparison to the daily celebration that we continue to live ever since. Pentecost reverses the arrow of time from past to present. It is an ongoing birthday celebration that continues with the gift of each new day, and expands whenever a child of God- whether eight years old or eighty-comes to a renewed faith in the Spirit of their creator.

Pentecost also teaches us to reverse our birthdays in our gift-giving customs. On our birthdays we expect to receive gifts, but recall that no visible gifts were given to the Apostles on Pentecost, it was they who-with great sacrifice-gave gifts away. It was they who offered their lives and livelihoods to bring the gifts of the Gospel, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to all the ends of the world. Can you imagine if on your birthday, instead of receiving gifts, you gave them away. Imagine inviting your friends to your home and rather than receiving gifts, you tell people to take what they want. Some people actually do this, it is called a reverse birthday party. I just might try it someday, though I am not sure if I can invite all of you ☺. But whether or not we reverse our own birthdays, I hope that today we realize how our Christian faith consistently urges us to reverse the arrow of our giving.

For we believe that God has opened his home to us, his great and beautiful creation and lets us to take whatever we want. He lets us take as much as we want of the air to breathe, food and water to nourish us, family and friends to enjoy. And we believe that on this Sunday of Pentecost, the birthday of the church, God again opens his house to us and bids us to take whatever we want. Take whatever we want from this sanctuary, which has the gift of God's son, the gift of spiritual nourishment, of forgiveness of our sins, and of eternal life. This is his birthday gift to us.

Let us then learn from our Lord in celebrating our birthdays. Let us not look back to a fading day in the past when we were born, but give thanks for the thousands of miraculous days since, that we have been reborn, including this one. And on the birthday of this church, let us learn from this blessed place how to give things away to God and others rather than focus on what we might receive. For we just might find that every day is a birthday, and the gifts we've already been given are of infinite worth, now and always; amen.