

Catholic Scripture Study International

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

SUGGESTED RESPONSES LESSON 2

THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

ACTS 2:1-47

1. Adult Jewish men were required to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate three yearly religious feasts described in the sixteenth chapter of Deuteronomy—Passover, the feast of Weeks, and the feast of Tabernacles. The word Pentecost, the Greek name for the annual feast of Weeks, is related to the 50 days and comes from the Septuagint, the collection of Hebrew Scriptures translated into the Greek at Alexandria in about 250 B.C. In Leviticus 23:15-17, God instructs the Israelites: “And you shall count from the day after the sabbath, from the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering [Passover]; seven full weeks shall they be, counting fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a cereal offering of new grain to the LORD. You shall bring from your dwellings two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah; they shall be of fine flour, they shall be baked with leaven, as first fruits to the LORD.”
2. In Acts 2:2, the sound of a mighty wind indicates the arrival of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem where the disciples have been praying for nine days. In the Old Testament, Genesis 1:1-1 likens the action of the Holy Spirit at creation to the movement of wind over water: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.” In Ezekiel 37:1-10, the prophet describes his vision of a valley filled with dry bones that come to life when the spirit of God breathes on them. Ezekiel 37:9 recounts these words of God spoken to the prophet: “Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to the spirit, prophesy, son of man, and say to the spirit, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O spirit, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.’” Paragraph 691 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The term ‘Spirit’ translates the Hebrew word *ruah*, which, in its primary sense, means breath, air, wind. Jesus indeed uses the sensory image of the wind to suggest to Nicodemus the transcendent newness of him who is personally God’s breath, the divine Spirit. On the other hand, ‘Spirit’ and ‘Holy’ are divine attributes common to the three divine persons. By joining the two terms, Scripture, liturgy, and theological language designate the inexpressible person of the Holy Spirit, without any possible equivocation with other uses of the terms ‘spirit’ and ‘holy.’”
3. In Acts 2:3-4, the Holy Spirit appears in the form of fire. Luke 3:15-16 records John the Baptist preaching about fire in connection with the sacrament of Baptism: “As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps

he were the Christ, John answered them all, ‘I baptize with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.’” Luke 12:49 records Jesus also preaching about fire, when he says: “I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!” Paul, in his First Letter to the Thessalonians 5:19, uses fire as a symbol for the transforming energy of the Holy Spirit’s actions when he cautions Christians: “Do not quench the Spirit.”

4. The descent of the Holy Spirit described in Acts 2:1-4 echoes a significant Old Testament manifestation of God that occurred at Mount Sinai after Moses led the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel out of Egypt. Noise accompanies both of these supernatural manifestations of God in world. Acts 2:2 records “a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind,” and Exodus 19:16 records God’s presence is announced by “a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.” Exodus 19:19 records: “as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.” Both supernatural events also are accompanied by fire. Acts 2:3 records: “And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them,” and Exodus 19:18 records: “And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.”
5. Acts 2:4-6 describes how devout Jews from every nation under heaven are able to understand the disciples, who have begun to speak in other tongues as a result of being filled with the Holy Spirit. This reverses what’s described in Genesis 11:1-9, when human attempts to build a tower at Babel are thwarted “because the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.” Acts 2:11 records that on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, the disciples begin telling “the mighty works of God,” and the Holy Spirit enables devout Jews from other countries to hear this Gospel message so that they can return to their own homes and also bear witness to the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
6. In Acts 2:14, Peter preaches to the multitude that has gathered, citing prophetic passages from the Old Testament book of Joel as an introductory text. Joel 2:28 prophesies the coming of a messianic age, and the prophet describes it in these words: “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.” The key indication of the messianic age, according to Joel, is that God will pour out his spirit on all people. Isaiah 32:15 prophesies about a time of desolation that will last “until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high.” In Isaiah 44:3, God speaks through the prophet, promising: “For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring.” In Ezekiel 36:26, God promises: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” In Ezekiel 39:29, God repeats his promise and includes a pledge to show his face to the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel: “[A]nd I will not hide my face any more from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD.”

7. In his Pentecost address, Peter cites passages from several of the Psalms to support his claim that Jesus Christ is the long-awaited Messiah. Psalm 16:10 promises that God won't give up his Son to Sheol, or let his "godly one see the pit," prophesying Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. Psalm 110:1, the most frequently cited Psalm in the New Testament, promises Jesus' victory over all opposition: "The LORD says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.'" Psalm 132:11 records: "The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: 'One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne,'" a reference to the kingdom of heaven that Jesus inherits. Paragraph 627 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "Christ's death was a real death in that it put an end to his earthly human existence. But because of the union which the person of the Son retained with his body, his was not a mortal corpse like others, for 'it was not possible for death to hold him' and therefore 'divine power preserved Christ's body from corruption.' Both of these statements can be said of Christ: 'He was cut off out of the land of the living,' and "My flesh will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let your Holy One see corruption.' Jesus' Resurrection 'on the third day' was the sign of this also, because bodily decay was held to begin on the fourth day after death."
8. In Acts 2:37, Luke records that when the people learn they're responsible for crucifying the Messiah, they're cut to the heart. In Acts 2:38, Peter tells them: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Paragraph 1226 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "From the very day of Pentecost the Church has celebrated and administered holy Baptism." Paragraph 1262 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* adds: "The different effects of Baptism are signified by the perceptible elements of the sacramental rite. Immersion in water symbolizes not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal. Thus the two principal effects are purification from sins and a new birth in the Holy Spirit." Paragraph 1427 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion." In Acts 2:39, when Peter preaches: "For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him," he's implying that children may receive the sacrament of Baptism. Paragraph 1252 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* indicates that the Church agrees with this interpretation: "The practice of infant Baptism is an immemorial tradition of the Church. There is explicit testimony to this practice from the second century on, and it is quite possible that, from the beginning of the apostolic preaching, when whole 'households' received baptism, infants may also have been baptized."
9. When Peter tells his listeners to save themselves from "this crooked generation," he's relating their situation to that of the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel who wandered in the wilderness for 40 years after being led out of Egypt by Moses. There's a parallel between what happens to the Israelites who rebel against God at Mount Sinai and what happens to the Jews who refuse to receive the Holy Spirit at Jerusalem. The Israelites who participated in the worship of the golden calf are condemned to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until all of them have died. Only then does God permit their descendants to enter the Promised Land. The rebellious Israelites no longer are considered God's children, and in Deuteronomy 32:5, the "Song of Moses," they're referred to as "a perverse and crooked generation." Peter's use of similar words constitutes a prophetic warning. Forty years after the day of

Pentecost described by Luke in the book of Acts, 1.2-million Jews are slaughtered during the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. In Acts 2:41, Luke records that there were about 3,000 souls who were baptized on the day of Pentecost. This number represents the first fruits of the new kingdom of God. Exodus 32:27-28 records that after Moses comes down from Mount Sinai and finds the Israelites worshipping a golden calf, he instructs the Levites to ““go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.’ And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses; and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.” On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descends on the disciples in Jerusalem, 3,000 souls are added, reversing what happened at Mount Sinai.

10. Acts 2:42 sets forth a “mission statement” for the first community of believers in Jerusalem by describing the basics of how Christians are to behave: “And they held steadfastly to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.” Paragraph 950 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The communion of the saints must be understood as the communion of the sacraments.” Paragraph 1329 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that “breaking of the bread” refers to the sacrament of the Eucharist. Paragraph 2624 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “In the first community of Jerusalem, believers ‘devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers.’ This sequence is characteristic of the Church’s prayer: founded on the apostolic faith; authenticated by charity; nourished in the Eucharist.” In Acts 2:47, Luke credits God with the astonishing growth of the early Church in Jerusalem: “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” In Matthew 16:18, Jesus specifically claims that he’s the builder of the Church: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

Responses to the Questions for Reflection will vary.