

PENTECOST

Pentecost, meaning 50 days, concludes our celebration of the Easter Season. For us the feast celebrates the tradition handed on by St Luke in the *Acts of the Apostles* that the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus (Easter Sunday).

Historically the Christian feast is based on the Jewish *Feast of Weeks* (Shavout or in Greek Pentecost). It was celebrated 50 days after the feast of *Unleavened Bread* that is linked with the feast of *Passover*. It was originally a harvest festival to mark the end of the wheat harvest. Later it became a celebration of the covenant made by God during the Exodus with Moses and the People of Israel at Sinai. Thus it celebrated a moment in the history of salvation when God intervened in the lives of the people.

In the Eastern Churches the focus of Pentecost is the conclusion of the Easter Season. In the Western Church Pentecost took on an identity of its own and even today the use of red vestments still gives the impression that it is separate from the Sundays of Easter. For many centuries the Sundays that followed were known as "Sundays after Pentecost", as if they were a separate liturgical season linked to Pentecost.

The Easter Candles, an image of the risen Christ, remains near the altar until after Pentecost thus showing that Pentecost is part of Easter. After the Sunday evening Mass it is moved to the baptismal font where it expresses the essential link between Easter and Baptism.

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