

The Church's Two Birthdays

Reverend Robert Gillelan • Pentecost Sunday • May 24, 2026

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Today on Pentecost we celebrate a birthday of the Church, and we call it a birthday because Pentecost marks the end of our Lord's Paschal mystery, His Paschal mission, His suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus ascends to the Father so that the Holy Spirit can descend and shower upon those disciples all of the gifts that the Holy Spirit has to give to embolden them, to inspire them, to empower them to go out to all the world and proclaim the good news. And the apostles did that, and the Church has done it for almost 2,000 years.

We know that because the Catholic Church has a presence on all seven continents and in almost every nation on Earth. So we call this a birthday because it represents the birth of the missionary Church, the missionary character of our Catholic Church. But there is another birthday, so think about it for a minute. What might be the other birthday of the Church?

Correct. It's Good Friday. Good Friday is the other birthday of the Church because Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Augustine say so. In their

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theology, the Catholic Church was born on Good Friday when Jesus died on the cross and His side was pierced with a spear and outflowed blood and water, the sacramental signs of sacramental life in the Church. And those signs mean water, baptism, and blood, the Eucharist, the two fundamental sacraments of the Church.

John Chrysostom and Saint Augustine saw in this just as Eve came forth from the side of Adam, so the Church came forth from the side of Christ.

When we think about birthdays, we think about gift-giving. And at this point, we should think about the gifts that Jesus and the Holy Spirit have poured out in copious amounts into the Church.

Let us start with Jesus and consider that as Jesus was preparing to give birth to this Church that we belong to today, He didn't just give us two sacraments, baptism and Eucharist. He gave us seven. And let's consider why He gave us those seven sacraments, because He knew we would need spiritual help at spiritually decisive times in our lives.

✓■ He gave us baptism to initiate us into the family of God.

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✓■ He gave us the Eucharist to spiritually nourish us on our spiritual journey.

✓■ He gave us confirmation to strengthen us.

✓■ He gave us the sacrament of reconciliation to forgive us.

✓■ He gave us the sacrament of anointing of the sick to heal us.

✓■ He gave us the sacrament of holy orders so that priests and deacons could serve the Church.

✓■ He gave us the sacrament of holy matrimony as a service to the family and the Church and society.

Absolutely brilliant that Jesus gave us all of these spiritual helps, not to mention all of His teachings, which give us moral and spiritual guidance in life. Let's not forget, the Ten Commandments handed on to Jesus and to us in the Catholic Church to give us moral guidance.

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And then there's the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who did not come to the Church empty-handed but came to give us seven gifts: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, piety, fortitude, and fear of the Lord. Just think of that.

In the words of George Gershwin “Who could ask for anything more?” Think of that!

We have the Ten Commandments. We have the teachings of Christ enshrined in the teachings of the Catholic Church. We have the seven sacraments. We have the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit to help us, to heal us, and to help us to grow in holiness, to live in our Lord's grace and friendship.

All of that is why we call the Church the Sacrament of Salvation, because we have everything we need and everything that we could want to help us to get to heaven (and basically on our way not to kill each other and tear each other apart.)

So today, as we celebrate these birthdays, and you can take or pick whichever one you want, I like to put them together and think instead of a

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date or a point, I like to think of a birthday process. Jesus and the Holy Spirit put an awful lot of thought into this to give us what we have today.

All of this, the Church, is under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has taken over the operation of this whole enterprise that we call 'Holy Mother Church.'

It is the Holy Spirit whose principal job description would be to lead us into all truth, which Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would do, and to keep us unified in our search for truth and holiness, and to be the foundation, the fundamental of our spiritual lives.

So whether you might put Friday as a birthday or whether you might Pentecost as a birthday for the Church, let us celebrate that birth of the one holy Catholic and apostolic Church born of blood and water and the Holy Spirit. May we rejoice in the abundant gifts that Jesus and the Holy Spirit have poured into our Church directly towards our salvation, and may we go forth like those first disciples encouraged to proclaim the good news.

Happy Feast Day.