

Pentecost
May 23, 2010
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To the Next Level

Acts 2:1-11
Psalm 104
1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13
John 14:15-16, 23b-26

One common element of most video and computer games is the “level.” Most games begin very easy and then move up in levels of difficulty. Despite the fact that games get harder, most of us don’t simply give up playing them. Rather, there is a challenge with each new level that impels us to continue playing. We know that each new level brings with it new resources and new rewards, and so we persevere. Relationships are very similar.

Most relationships begin very simple. They are easy at first and, as time passes, they become increasingly more difficult. We find ourselves need new resources in order to deepen the relationship. As the relationship reaches new levels, we also experience new “rewards,” or blessings with it. The same is true in our relationship with God.

The Bible is the story of God’s deepening relationship with humanity. There are levels to this relationship. What was relatively easy at first becomes more and more challenging. Yet, there are new resources and new rewards with each new level of our relationship with God. One Scriptural example of our relationship with God being taken to a new level can be found in the Gospel of John, chapter fifteen, when Jesus tells His disciples, “I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father” (John 15:15).

Our celebration of Pentecost today also reminds us of God’s desire to take our relationship to a new level. We see this very clearly when we look at the Jewish celebration of Pentecost compared with the Christian celebration Pentecost. The *Jewish* Feast of Pentecost, also known as Shavuot, is a feast that commemorates the anniversary of when God gave the Torah to the Israelites. It is celebrated on the “morrow,” seven weeks after Passover. This is where the name “Pentecost” comes from—it is the *fiftieth* day after Passover.¹

In the Bible, Shavuot is not only known as Pentecost, but also the “Festival of Weeks” (Exodus 34:22), “Festival of Reaping” (Exodus 23:16), and the “Day of the First Fruits” (Numbers 28:16). The last two names remind us that the Jewish Feast of Pentecost is not only the celebration of God’s giving the Torah, but it is also a celebration of the grain harvest. In ancient Israel, the grain harvest lasted seven weeks.

Because of the Feast’s connection to the grain harvest, it was customary for individuals to bring their first fruits, their *tithe* of the harvest, to the temple as a gift to God. This was the context in which the Apostles were gathered together in Jerusalem. However, God moved their celebration to a whole new level. Instead of their bringing a tithe of their harvest to God, God sent them the gift of the Holy Spirit. He empowered them to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in a whole new way! They were given the resources—the gifts of the Holy Spirit—that

¹ For those of you who are challenged at math like I am, seven weeks equals 49 days and the “morrow” is the 50th day.

they would need for the new challenges of their relationship with God. The new reward for this new level of relationship was a greater intimacy with Christ.

In the context of God leading us into new levels of relationship, the reward is always the same—a deeper intimacy with Christ. So how do you and I know when God is inviting to a new level of relationship with Him? Well, He often uses the circumstances of our lives. Life changes such as weddings, the birth of babies, graduations, job changes, and illness are all things that God loves to use to call us to a new level of relationship with Him. He uses these changes to offer us new resources that require us to trust Him more and to become more like His Son, Jesus Christ.

This week, as we continue to celebrate the birthday of the Church, Pentecost, I invite us to prayerfully reflect on where our relationship with God is at. How is He inviting us to a new level of love? What are the resources He is giving us in order to love at the new level? How is He inviting us into a greater intimacy with Christ?

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ In your prayer journal, describe your relationship with God. What is it like? Who is God like? Who are you like? What is the circumstance right now in your life that God seems to be using to lead you to a new level of relationship? Is there a story in the life of Christ that reminds you of what you are going through right now?