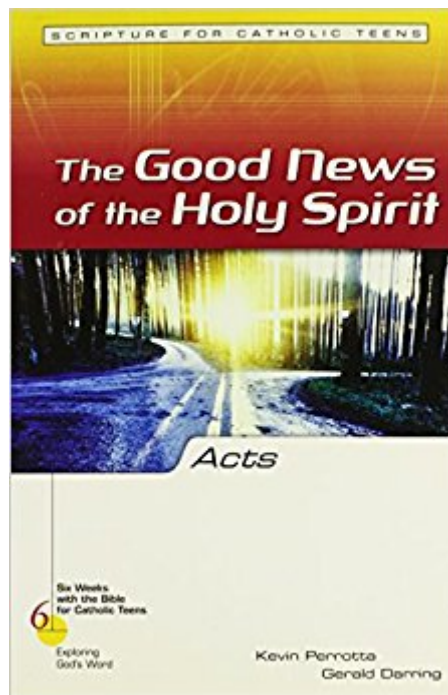




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# Acts: The Good News Of The Holy Spirit (Six Weeks With The Bible For Catholic Teens)



## Synopsis

This Bible study for teens, Acts: The Good News of the Holy Spirit, is an excellent way to introduce young adults to how the Church began. Like the early Jewish followers of Jesus, the Spirit leads us also into drama and conflict. God challenges us to change. He challenges us to move beyond a simplistic childhood understanding of him and develop a mature adult faith. He wishes us to serve him in new ways, and summons us to go beyond our limited expectations of how much we might love, how selflessly we might serve, what suffering we might endure. He wishes us to experience his powerful help as we grow up. He wishes to work through us to make Jesus known. He wishes us to have an influence on the people around us. In all these respects, reading Acts leads us to question our lives and open our hearts to a new cooperation with the Spirit of God. Designed as a guided discovery, Six Weeks with the Bible for Catholic Teens introduces high school students to different books of the Bible by integrating the biblical text with insightful questions to help youth discern what Scripture means for their lives today. The series provides students with a clear explanation of Biblical text, opportunities for prayer, and a means to enter into conversation with God.Â

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This Bible study for teens, Acts: The Good News of the Holy Spirit, is an excellent way to introduce young adults to how the Church began. Like the early Jewish followers of Jesus, the Spirit leads us also into drama and conflict. God challenges us to change. He challenges us to move beyond a

simplistic childhood understanding of him and develop a mature adult faith. He wishes us to serve him in new ways, and summons us to go beyond our limited expectations of how much we might love, how selflessly we might serve, what suffering we might endure. He wishes us to experience his powerful help as we grow up. He wishes to work through us to make Jesus known. He wishes us to have an influence on the people around us. In all these respects, reading Acts leads us to question our lives and open our hearts to a new cooperation with the Spirit of God.

**How to Use This Guide** You might compare this volume to a short visit to a national park. The park is so large that you could spend months, even years, getting to know it. But a brief visit, if carefully planned, can be worthwhile. In a few hours you can drive through the park and pull over at a handful of sites. At each stop you can get out of the car, take a short trail through the woods, listen to the wind blowing in the trees, get a feel for the place. In this volume weâ€™ll travel through the Acts of the Apostles, making half a dozen stops along the way. At those points weâ€™ll proceed on foot, taking a leisurely walk through the selected passages. The readings have been chosen to take us to the heart of the bookâ€™s message. After each discussion, weâ€™ll get back in the car and take the highway to the next stop. â€œBetween Discussionsâ€• pages summarize the portions of Acts that we will pass along the way. This guide provides everything you need to explore Acts of the Apostles in six discussionsâ€”or to do a six-part exploration on your own. The introduction on page 6 will prepare you to get the most out of your reading. The weekly sections feature key passages from Acts, with explanations that highlight what these words mean for us today. Equally important, each section supplies questions that will launch you into fruitful discussion, helping you both to explore Acts for yourself and to learn from one another. If youâ€™re using the guide by yourself, the questions will spur your personal reflection. Each discussion is meant to be a guided discovery. **Guided** ~ None of us is equipped to read the Bible without help. We read the Bible for ourselves but not by ourselves. Scripture was written to be understood and applied in and with the Church. So each week â€œA Guide to the Readingâ€• supplies background and explanations. The guide will help you grasp the bookâ€™s message. Think of it as a friendly park ranger who points out noteworthy details and explains what youâ€™re looking at so you can appreciate things for yourself. **Discovery** ~ The purpose is for you to interact with Acts. â€œQuestions for a Closer Lookâ€• is a tool to help you dig into the book and examine it carefully. â€œQuestions for Applicationâ€• will help you consider what Acts means for your life here and now. Each week concludes with an â€œApproach to Prayerâ€• section that helps you respond to Godâ€™s Word. Supplementary â€œLiving Traditionâ€• and â€œSaints in the Makingâ€• sections offer the thoughts and experiences

of Christians past and present in order to show you what Acts has meant to othersâ”so that you can consider what it might mean for you. If you are using this guide for individual study, pay special attention to the questions provided for each week (Warm-Up Questions, Questions for a Closer Look, Questions for Application). One advantage of individual study is that you can take all the time you need to consider all the questions. You may also want to read Acts in its entirety. You will find that the “Between Discussions” pages will help you understand the portions of Acts that are not covered in this guide. Take your time making your way through Acts and this accompanying volume: let your reading be an opportunity for Acts to become God’s words to you.

**A History in Which We Can Share** Introducing the Acts of the Apostles The philosopher George Santayana wrote that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” According to this view, the reason for studying history is to learn about the errors people made in the past in order to avoid committing those errors again. This kind of study happened after the atrocities of the Holocaust in Nazi Germany. Scholars and historians studied the Holocaust to figure out how something like that could have happened. Saint Luke, who wrote the history of the early Church called Acts of the Apostles, saw another purpose for remembering the past. If asked for his view, he would probably have said that those who are ignorant of the past cannot play their part in the present. Luke wrote his history to help his friend Theophilus better understand the origins of the Church and of the Gospel that Luke had received (1:1; unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this volume are to Acts). Theophilus would then be prepared to take part in the Church’s life and mission. World leaders have been urged to remember the Holocaust so that such genocide will never occur again. Luke, on the other hand, wanted Theophilus to learn the lessons of the Church in Jerusalem, Joppa, Antioch, and Philippi so as to continue living the same life that the first Christians began to live when the Holy Spirit came to them. Luke probably wrote around the year a.d. 80, and 19 centuries later his history can serve the same purpose for us. Acts of the Apostles puts us in touch with the foundational events of the Church to which we belong. By understanding our history, we can enter more deeply into it. The first Christians’ situation was quite different from our situation today, but we can share their experience. God calls us to open ourselves to the same Spirit, to practice the same mutual love and to carry out the same mission that we read about in Luke’s history. Luke wants us to know that those who remember the past are enabled to repeat it. The book that Luke wrote

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If Luke could examine one of our Bibles today, he might be surprised to find that the two parts of his work are not placed together in the New Testament. Part one, Luke’s Gospel, is grouped with the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John. Part two, Acts of the Apostles, is placed after the Gospels. In this arrangement, the two sections of

Luke's work are separated by the Gospel of John. There are good reasons for this arrangement: putting all four Gospels together at the beginning of the New Testament indicates the central importance of Jesus himself. But when reading Acts we should keep in mind that the two parts of Luke's work go together. Luke wrote a two-volume history because he was describing a two-stage action of God. When we view the two volumes of the story together, we get a better understanding of how the two stages of God's action are related to each other. Luke tells the following story in his two-stage work. God had given the people of Israel a special relationship with himself and had promised that he would rescue them from oppression. He fulfilled this promise through Jesus of Nazareth, his Son. God made himself powerfully present to people through Jesus' teaching, miracles, reconciliation of sinners, and inclusion of outcasts. When Jesus accepted a painful death in obedience to God's plans, God raised him from death and placed him in authority over all things. That was stage one, the Gospel of Luke. In stage two, Acts of the Apostles, God sent the Holy Spirit to Jesus' followers. The Spirit enabled them to continue in the way of forgiveness, humility, and care for the needy that Jesus had begun. The Spirit gave them the strength to invite people everywhere to join in this graced life by believing in Jesus. There are similarities between the two stages. Just as God sent his Son Jesus to make his kingdom present in the world, God has now sent his Spirit to Jesus' followers, who are to extend the presence of his kingdom. Just as God confirmed Jesus' announcement of the kingdom with powerful signs, he now gives signs that confirm the Church's message about Jesus. Jesus had to suffer to accomplish God's purposes; the members of the Church will also have to suffer as they carry out their mission. It is clear from this summary of Luke's two-part narrative that the principal actor in the whole drama is God. God exercises the initiative. God unfolds a grand plan, first through Jesus, then through the Church. This in turn, highlights the importance of the Church. By his Spirit, God continues through the Church the work that he began through Jesus. The Church is not an afterthought, not a mere human attempt to remember Jesus. The Church is God's instrument in the world. Acts is a history, but we need to be clear about the type of history it is. In Luke's culture, history writers would often reshape their material in order to bring out the meaning of events for their readers. Scholars who have examined Luke's work closely have found many indications of the historical nature of his reports. Yet in many ways Luke told his story in such a way as to convey his theology of the Spirit and of the Church. We can be confident, then, that in Acts we are getting a fundamentally reliable picture of the early Church. We must be aware, however, that Luke has not tried to present the kind of objectively factual account that would be found in a history textbook. Acts is full of drama and conflict. ~ In order to appreciate the drama, we need to see

the situation of the first Christians from their point of view. Let us imagine that we could travel back to Jerusalem around the year a.d. 30. We arrive in a world that has no international Church. In fact, there are no church buildings or external signs of Christianity at all. No one keeps Sunday as a religious day; no one celebrates Christmas; no one follows a calendar counting years from the birth of Christ. Let us suppose that we arrive in Jerusalem just after Jesus has finished appearing to his disciples following his Resurrection. He has told them to remain in Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit to come to them. They are now gathered in a spacious home, praying and waiting. There are only about 120 of them, men and women. All the disciples are Jews, so it makes sense that they have a thoroughly Jewish outlook. If you asked them who Jesus is, they would tell you that he is the Messiah appointed by God to bring liberation and holiness to the people of Israel<sup>1</sup> and that he now reigns with God. If you asked them what God is doing for Israel through Messiah Jesus, they would say that he is inaugurating the final period of history, the end times, in which he will give saving help to his people. If you looked around the room at the disciples and asked them who they are, they would identify themselves as the renewed community of Israel<sup>2</sup> "the portion of Israel gathered around the Messiah. Why is it, you might ask them, that Messiah Jesus does not seem to have a program for bringing Jews back to the land of Israel from the foreign lands where most of them live? Why does he not seem to have a program for purifying the Temple so that it might be a place where God<sup>3</sup>'s presence is powerfully manifested? Why does he not seem to have a program for freeing the Jews from the oppression of the pagan Romans? In other words, why isn<sup>4</sup> Jesus doing the things that most Jews are expecting God to accomplish for Israel? The disciples might reply that they themselves have been deeply puzzled by this, but that, while they still have questions, they have begun to grasp that Jesus is fulfilling God<sup>5</sup>'s plans for Israel in a different but better way. The disciples might admit that they don<sup>6</sup> know what the coming of the Messiah will mean for non-Jews. Jewish expectations on this question varied, and Jesus did not fully clarify the matter for them. If you asked whether non-Jews could join the renewed community of Israel founded by Jesus without being circumcised, the disciples might stare at you in astonishment and stop the interview, thinking that you are no longer interested in asking serious questions. There is drama and conflict in Acts because God<sup>7</sup>'s actions went beyond traditional Jewish understandings of God and Israel. God leads the disciples to bring the message of the expected-but-surprising Messiah Jesus to their fellow Jews. Some Jews accept the message and experience dramatic changes in their lives. Others reject it, and begin to argue with and persecute the disciples. Conflict occurs among the disciples as well, as God leads them to a new understanding of his purposes for Gentiles. (The word Gentile refers to any person who is not of the Jewish faith.) Our reading in Week 1 is all drama.

Peter, with the rest of the 12 apostles, appeals to his fellow Jews to change the way they think about Jesus and to recognize him as the promised Messiah. In a remarkable change of heart, thousands of Peter's listeners come to believe in Jesus and join Jesus' community of the renewed Israel. Jesus' salvation gives the new disciples not a nationalistic restoration but a life in the Spirit. A community of believers develops in which men and women experience forgiveness and joy through the Spirit as they worship God together, share a community life, and care for each other's material needs. Before long, conflict sets in. In Week 2 the apostles' proclamation of Jesus brings them into confrontation with fellow Jews, especially the religious leaders, who do not accept Jesus because he does not fit their expectations for how God will come to save Israel. Among the Jews of the day was an influential party called the Pharisees, who were known for being strict observers of the Mosaic law. There was much common ground between Jesus and the Pharisees, but many of them reacted against Jesus, for he claimed that God's Kingdom was becoming present through himself. This was a claim that displaced the Mosaic law from its central role in Judaism. When Jesus' followers claimed that he was now risen from the dead and ruling as Messiah and Lord over the final phase of God's dealings with Israel, this struck Pharisees as blasphemous. Many Pharisees hoped that their strict observance of the law would hasten the day when God would grant national restoration to Israel. From their perspective, Jewish Christians' devotion to Jesus was a dangerous diversion. Our reading in Week 3 shows us a Pharisee named Saul (also called Paul), who puts himself in the forefront of efforts to remove the Christian cancer from the body of Judaism. And then—in one of the most dramatic turnarounds in the entire history of the Church—Jesus appears to Saul and convinces him that Jesus truly has both fulfilled and transcended the expectations of Judaism. In Week 4 the focus switches to the disciples' own efforts to grasp how Jesus and the Spirit are leading them beyond traditional Jewish expectations. An extraordinary series of actions by the Spirit transports Peter across the religious and cultural divide separating Jews from Gentiles. Despite the dramatic activity of the Spirit, the idea that Messiah Jesus wishes to be personal Lord over Gentiles is not easy for the disciples to accept. Peter's welcoming of Gentiles directly into the community of the renewed Israel without their first becoming Jews clashes so fundamentally with Jewish expectations that it creates conflict within the Christian community. Thus in Week 5 we read about a council of Church leaders that gathers to figure out what God wants them to do. Once the Spirit has led the disciples to see that the good news about Jesus goes beyond its Jewish roots and reaches out to all people, the way is open for missionary work. In our final selection, Week 6, we observe Paul's missionary labors among Gentiles. At this point, a new source of conflict appears, as Jewish Christians preaching the one

God and his Son Jesus encounter people whose culture is based on belief in many gods. Questions for modern readers

~ Returning to the 21st century, we reflect on what we have learned. Like the early Jewish followers of Jesus, the Spirit leads us also into drama and conflict. God challenges us to change. He challenges us to move beyond a simplistic childhood understanding of him and develop a mature adult faith. He wishes us to serve him in new ways, and summons us to go beyond our limited expectations of how much we might love, how selflessly we might serve, what suffering we might endure. He wishes us to experience his powerful help as we grow up. He wishes to work through us to make Jesus known. He wishes us to have an influence on the people around us. In all these respects, reading Acts leads us to question our lives and open our hearts to a new cooperation with the Spirit of God.

Week 1 The Spirit Arrives Warm-Up Questions

1 On your last birthday, what did you do that was special?

2 Describe a memorable dream. Did it have a message?

3 What was the most important decision you ever made on the spur of the moment? How did it turn out?

Opening the Bible The Reading Acts 2:1-47

Zero Hour of the Christian World Mission 2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. 5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?" 9 "In our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." 10 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 11 But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." 12 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 13 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 14 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 15 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. 16 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. 17 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. 18 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the



coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. 21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. 22 "You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—23 this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. 24 But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. 32 "This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. 36 Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified. 37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do? 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him. 40 And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation. 41 So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. The Christian Community 43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Questions for a Closer Look 1 Which of God's deeds of power were the disciples probably speaking about in verse 11? Does Peter's preaching help you answer this question? 2 What is repentance? Why does Peter call people to repent? 3 In a single sentence, how would you summarize Peter's message in verses 16–21? in verses 22–36? 4 What other responses might the crowd have made to Peter's declaration in verses 22–36? Why did they respond as they did? 5 What is the "promise" Peter talks about in verse 39? 6 What sorts of things do people do when the Holy Spirit comes to them (see 2:38–41, 42)?

A Guide to the Reading 2:1–3 In the large house of a prosperous Jerusalem resident, a half mile or so from the place where Jesus died and rose, 120 of his followers

are praying together. They are waiting for Jesus to fulfill a promise he made repeatedly after his Resurrection (1:5,8). Suddenly an explosion of mysterious wind and fire fills the house. Jesus's promise, the Holy Spirit, has arrived. Flames settle above the heads of all 120 disciples: every member of the community receives the Spirit. The manner of the Spirit's coming recalls the moment, centuries earlier, when God made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. The sound of the wind from heaven that fills the house echoes the frightening noise that announced God's presence at Sinai; the flames reflect God's descent to the mountain in fire. By breathing life into the community of Jesus's followers, God is renewing his covenant with Israel. The whole people of Israel must be invited to share in this life, and the Spirit has come to enable the disciples to do this task. The flames take the shape of tongues because the Spirit will guide the disciples to speak. They receive the Spirit not just for their own benefit, but so they might serve others.

2:4 "13 ~ We may suppose that the disciples make their way to the courtyards of the Temple, the only place in Jerusalem that can accommodate a large crowd. Jews from all over the world are present. All are astonished to hear the disciples speaking in the visitors's native languages about God's actions (2:6 "11). (This is not the same thing as the speaking in unknown languages that other early Christians experienced as a gift of the Spirit, since that speaking in tongues required interpretation.) 2:14 "15 ~ Peter, as leader of the apostles, steps forward to offer an explanation. To the accusation that the disciples are drunk, he offers a laid-back response. "Drunk? Before breakfast? Give me a break! • 2:16 "21 ~ In a more serious vein, Peter explains that the ability of the disciples to speak in foreign languages shows that God's Spirit has arrived, marking the beginning of a new era in God's dealings with the human race. Peter calls it "the last days." • He does not mean that the world is about to end, but that the final period of history has begun. Peter uses cosmic imagery from the prophet Joel not to predict that the world will soon end but to make his listeners aware of what the gift of the Spirit means. 2:22 "36 ~ Peter tells his listeners that they were mistaken about Jesus when they demanded his death seven weeks earlier. He explains that through Jesus the new age of God's dealings with the human race was dawning, as his healings and other miracles indicated. Now God has raised Jesus from death and has made him ruler over all things, in fulfillment of a long-standing divine plan. 2:37 "40 ~ The crowd is shaken and asks Peter what they should do. "Repent!" • he says. The Greek word means "exchange your mind." • They should, of course, repent in the sense of turning away from sin; but first of all they should change their minds about Jesus and then decide to redirect their lives toward him. Peter's preaching offers a second chance to those of his listeners who had called for Jesus's death. His warning not to let it slip away "Save yourself from this corrupt generation" is not

a condemnation of the whole world. In Old Testament terminology, the term "corrupt generation" referred especially to people who saw God's mighty acts but then walked away unaffected. 2:41-47 "Thousands of men and women accept Peter's message and are baptized" the greatest miracle of Pentecost! There is plenty of water nearby, kept on hand for use in the temple services and for ritual bathing. The infant Church has now come into existence. It is filled with God's Spirit and guided by the leadership group that gives it continuity with Jesus. A pattern of teaching and prayer, public testimony and mutual care quickly develops. To experience salvation through Jesus means "being added" to this community (2:47).

Questions for Application 1 Peter calls his listeners to change the way they think about Jesus. What is your picture of Jesus? How do you think your picture of Jesus might change as you get older? What might happen in your life that could change your picture of Jesus? 2 In what ways does God give us a second (or third, or 10th) chance in life? What are some things we can do to take advantage of those opportunities? 3 What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? Do you know someone who seems filled with the Spirit? How do you experience the presence of the Spirit in your life? How can Christians make themselves open to the Spirit? 4 Where in your life (for example, in your family, school, parish, neighborhood) do you see signs of God's activity? How does God call young people to cooperate with what he is doing? 5 What do you find attractive about the church in Jerusalem after Pentecost? What aspects of it offer a model for the Church today? What is the most challenging point in this reading for the Church today? Why?

Approach to Prayer Listen as a member of the group reads Acts 2:38-39 aloud: Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." • Pause for a few moments of silent reflection. Close your time together by praying the Our Father.

Supplement for Individual Reading A Living Tradition Come, Holy Spirit! One of the most beautiful medieval Latin hymns may have been written by Innocent III, a 13th-century pope. It is sung every year during Mass on the feast of Pentecost. The prayer is meaningful for everyone, including today's young Catholics. Come, Holy Spirit. Shine into waiting hearts and minds your radiance bright. Our young hearts and minds are open and ready to receive the light of the Spirit. Come, you Father of the poor, come, you giver of all store, come, our souls' light. Many of us are "poor" in different ways: hungry for love, lacking the basic necessities of self-confidence and respect for others, socially outcast and spiritually needy. The Spirit is our Father, the one who gives us what we need and lights up our lives. You, of comforters the best, you, our hearts' dearest guest, in turmoil, kind relief; you, our respite in

distress, in the noontime, cool caress, comfort in our grief. It's tough sometimes, this process of maturing into young adults. There are periods of turmoil and moments of distress, and at these times we welcome the comfort of the Spirit. O Light making all things new, the depths of all who hope in you with yourself fill. Our young lives are filled with new experiences. The Spirit fills us with hope, confidence that God and God's people are leading us in the right direction. If you should take your grace away, nothing good in us can stay, all turns to ill. We know that we can always rely on the help of the Spirit. Friends and relatives might disappoint us at times, but the Spirit will never let us down. Wash the grime of sin away, irrigate our barren clay, our illnesses heal; soften every hardened will, thaw the frozen, warm the chill, your ways reveal. We make mistakes, but then we know that the Spirit is there to help us walk away from those mistakes better children of God. With the help of the Spirit, those mistakes will help us grow in our understanding of God's ways. Give to all your faithful, Lord, to those who trust in your reward, all gifts of grace. Give us all the help we need to be loving and respectful children, hard-working students, faithful friends, and dedicated Catholics. Give us virtue's blessed goal, give a death that brings us whole before your face. Help us to stay on the road that leads to a holy death. Amen. Alleluia.

If you are like the rest of us, you look forward to celebrating your birthday every year. You might have cake and ice cream with relatives and friends, and your parents might give you a nice present. Your celebration is forward-looking, focused on your maturing into an adult, but it is also backward-looking, recalling that first moment in your life when you were finally functioning on your own. The second chapter of Acts is very much like a birth. Pentecost has been called the birthday of the Church, and Luke's account portrays the Church as a kind of newborn infant. We can look at the newborn Church described in the second chapter of Acts and recognize the basic elements that will grow and mature in the centuries to follow. For instance, Luke shows us that the Church is

1. People empowered by the Spirit
  - ~ The Spirit comes to breathe life into Jesus' followers, and there is a burst of activity—marvelous signs of God's presence, inspired preaching, people turning to the Lord, strangers loving one another. We might say that the Church is the group of people among whom the Holy Spirit makes things happen.
2. A community
  - ~ Each person receives the Spirit, but not as isolated individuals; the Spirit comes to a community of people joined in prayer and hope. The Spirit makes the group larger by bringing in many new members and deepens their relationship with each other. Because the members share together in the life of God, they throw their lives open to one another and use their resources to take care of each other.
3. A hierarchical community
  - ~ Before the Spirit comes, Jesus appoints a group of 12 men as leaders. The leader of the leaders, Peter, makes the first public announcement of Jesus' Resurrection. This leadership structure is

essential for the community of those who follow Jesus. Jesus entrusted his teaching to these leaders, and they will base the formation of an authentic, Christian community on that teaching. 4. A community on a mission ~ The coming of the Spirit marks the start of Pentecost. This makes possible Peter's preaching about Jesus as Messiah and Lord. As a result of Peter's preaching, thousands of people come to believe in Jesus, are baptized, and join the Church. The miracle of the disciples speaking in the native languages of the people in the crowd suggests that people of every language and culture will receive the Christian message. 5. A community where everyone plays a part ~ Peter emphasizes that the Spirit is for male and female, young and old, rich and poor. The Church is for everyone, from prominent male apostles to poor widows. Every member contributes to the proclamation of Jesus by helping make it a community of mutual love. The very existence of a community of love that bridges class and social divisions is proof of a divine source of power. 6. A community that worships together ~ The first Christians came together for morning and evening prayers in the Temple and worship in their homes (including the Lord's Supper). This pattern of celebration enabled the mystery of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to continue to be present among them. 7. A community where Jesus' mother is present ~ Mary is among the disciples at Pentecost. She was already completely open to the action of God's Spirit and was the first to believe in her son. Now she is a sign of faith and hope to the disciples. In the heart of the Church, as fellow disciple and beloved mother of the Lord, she will continue to pray and bear witness to her son in every age.

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