

Father O'Connor's Homily on 24 May 2026
The Feast of Pentecost-C

Acts of the Apostles 2: 1-11

1 Corinthians 12: 3b-7, 12-13

John 20: 19-23

Today is the Feast of Pentecost. We celebrate 1) the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and disciples – their Confirmation, 2) the birthday of the Church, and 3) the close of the Easter season.

Pentecost is a Greek word that means “the fiftieth day.” Fifty days ago today was Easter Sunday.

Pentecost is a word that the Jewish people used as well. The Feast of Weeks or the Feast of Harvest was celebrated fifty days after Passover. That is why in the Acts of the Apostles there were so many Jewish people in Jerusalem for their Feast of Pentecost, an agricultural festival thanking God for a fruitful grain harvest.

The Jewish Pentecost also reminded them that on the fiftieth day after the Passover of the Lord, when they were freed from slavery in Egypt, Moses went up the mountain of Sinai and received the Ten Commandments from God.

So fifty days after their release from slavery in Egypt, the Jewish people were given the Law of God through Moses – and became a nation.

And fifty days after Easter, the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles and disciples who were gathered together in prayer – and the Church was born.

And this same Holy Spirit is with us today, inspiring us as members of the Church and reminding us of all that Jesus taught us.

How is the Holy Spirit active in our lives... in your life? I thought that I would tell you a story today about a famous ship and all the adaptations that she made, in hopes that you might look for the inspiration and the power of the Holy Spirit in the ongoing changes in your life.

That famous ship, the Queen Mary, now sits permanently docked in Long Beach, California and is enjoying life as a hotel and tourist attraction after sailing for over 30 years on the high seas.

The Queen Mary embarked on her maiden voyage on 27 May 1936 – 90 years ago this week – departing from Southampton England and arriving

five days later in New York, which was quite a record for speed in those days.

In her glory days, she carried nearly two thousand passengers who were served by a crew of over one thousand. She was the premier luxury liner of the time.

World War II changed all that and the Queen Mary underwent a transformation. The ship became known as the Grey Ghost after it was camouflage-painted and its portholes were blackened out. Now a military transport ship, she traveled more than 600,000 miles and carried over 800,000 troops.

Is there something about the Queen Mary for us to consider on this Feast of Pentecost? Yes, I believe there is. When given the choice between remaining a luxury liner for the rich and famous, or becoming a fast-running military transport ship, and bringing glory to the British crown, the Queen Mary chose the path of service.

And now the Queen Mary's use as a luxury liner and as a transport carrier is no longer possible. So since 1967 she is creatively living as a floating hotel and event space. And she is no mere museum. She is still earning her keep in yet another way.

Why do I tell you this story? Because the story of the Queen Mary points out three deep lessons for life: about the past, the present and the future. And all three lessons involve the inspiration and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

First, about the past, we are celebrating Memorial Day weekend. We remember those men and women whose lives, like the Queen Mary's, were changed when war broke out.

They all knew that, like the mighty ship, they had the choice of self-interest or service. They chose service, and many of them paid for this with their lives.

A task that no one saw coming or wished for was set before them. And which, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, they nobly and heroically embraced so that we and our world could be safe and secure. And we remember them and all of our men and women in uniform, and their families, with gratitude and respect.

Second, the story of the Queen Mary is a paradigm of what happens to us. Like that ship, we start out in life "great," so to speak. Then, as life goes on, the unexpected occurs and we must keep making adjustments: with such

things as sickness, depression, a divorce, a family member with a dependency, financial setbacks, a death, and the ravages of time and aging.

Suddenly a choice is before us: to forever keep looking back at the past, to drive along the highway of life with our eyes fixed on the rearview mirror, to keep propping up our old persona like an aging movie star loading makeup on a face that just won't lie anymore. Or, like the Queen Mary, to adapt creatively in ways that serve others and make us grow.

And so, on this Feast of Pentecost, as life's circumstances change around us, we ask the Holy Spirit: How can I serve now? How can I grow now? What is the Lord calling me to now? Not then, but now!

And third, like the Queen Mary, we are making our future **now**, and this **now** can never be re-captured.

Every person who ever came into this world was sent by God to do some special task. Every person is "a dream of God."

The Queen Mary never dreamed that she would be anything but a luxury liner for the rich and famous. But when war broke out and courage and service were needed, she came through.

The Queen Mary didn't get stuck in one category. And so we must respond to new challenges in our lives.

At the time she was built, with the forward-looking design and engineering of the day, the Queen Mary didn't realize that she was also being built for future service. And so are we. And God has equipped us with what we need to keep on making a difference as time moves on.

So link your life with the power of the Holy Spirit. In the midst of life's changing circumstances, do not be afraid to imagine what you might still do in this world when you let the Holy Spirit loose in your life.

"Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth." And inspire us and empower us during the changing circumstances of our lives to become all that you have created us to be.

Come, Holy Spirit. Come.