

Keeping the Vigil of Pentecost

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Saint Augustine once said that the Easter Vigil is the “mother of all vigils.” The powerful significance of fire, light, the readings, the prayers, water, oil, the Eucharist, and the dismissal evoke and mediate the God of Jesus Christ who comes in the midst of the Church gathered for liturgy.

The revised Roman Missal has provided the option of an extended vigil for Pentecost. While the Vigil for Pentecost is not as lengthy as the Easter Vigil (since there are no initiations or service of light), it provides an opportunity for a parish to celebrate the end of Easter Time with an extended liturgy. The extended form of the Vigil resembles the Liturgy of the Word at the Easter Vigil because it allows for more readings, with each reading followed by a Psalm (or canticle in some cases) and a prayer.

The first option for the Pentecost Vigil combines Evening Prayer and Mass. According to the revised Roman Missal, the “Vigil Mass may be celebrated on Saturday evening, either before or after First Vespers (Evening Prayer I) of Pentecost Sunday.” One option is to combine Evening Prayer and the extended Vigil. In this case, the Vigil begins with the introductory verse and the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* hymn/chant or with an entrance procession with the antiphon. The priest celebrant then greets the assembly, though the Penitential Act is omitted. The psalmody for Evening Prayer is sung (up to the reading of Evening Prayer). Then the opening Collect for the Vigil Mass is prayed. Mass continues with the four readings (including the four Responsorial Psalms and four Collects) and Gospel from the Lectionary.

The second option is to celebrate the extended Vigil without combining the Vigil with Evening Prayer. Whichever option a parish finds suitable for their context, both options have the same readings, Psalms, and Collects—though *The Roman Missal* allows the reading to be followed by a period of silence and then the Collect so that the Psalm is omitted.

The four readings include: (1) Genesis 11:1–9, the Tower of Babel; (2) Exodus 19:3–8, 16–20b, the Sinai Covenant God made with Moses and the Israelites; (3) Ezekiel 37:1–14, God’s spirit enlivening the dry bones; and (4) Joel 3:1–5, the outpouring of the Spirit.



The First Reading conveys God’s power through the Spirit to bring people together, to create communion in diversity. In the Second Reading, the gift of the covenant to the Israelites was spoken by God who was present as fire. God’s covenant with Israel continues in a new way through the person of Christ Jesus. Through sharing in Eucharist, we continue our participation in this covenant through Christ’s Body and Blood. God’s Spirit gathers us, transforms bread and wine into his Body and Blood, and actively incorporates us into God’s covenant, God’s presence.

The Third Reading evokes for us the resurrection of the dead. God’s Spirit raises those in the sleep of death to new life, which is union with Christ Jesus. Baptism is the sacrament that incorporates us into the new life of Christ. We enter not only into the Church and have original sin removed, but we also participate in the communion of the Trinity. As disciples, we await the final resurrection of the dead when we will be fully in communion with the Triune God. As disciples, the life we live in communion with the Church and with the Triune God is a way of life we strive to live in all we do and say.

The Fourth Reading calls us to live as disciples, as witnesses to the world of God’s gracious deeds. Therefore, the readings together remind us of God’s promises, God’s faithfulness, and God’s call for us to enter deeper communion with the Triune God and one another so that we might live the transformation we have received through Word and Sacrament.

Just as the Easter Vigil is a powerful celebration of the beginning of Easter Time, the extended Vigil of Pentecost can be a powerful conclusion to Easter. Like any well-prepared liturgy, it will require good proclaimers of the Word, Psalms in which people can participate through singing, and priest celebrants deliberate and prayerful in proclaiming the Collects. This preparation should be part of the parish’s liturgical committee’s agenda. While an option, the extended Vigil provides a rich and full celebration of the mystery of Pentecost—the mystery of the God who through Christ and the power of the Spirit calls us to deeper communion so that the Spirit of God might burn brighter in our lives.

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