THE NEW SHOFAR

If from one burning lamp someone lights another, then another from that one, and so on in succession, he has light continuously. In the same way, through the Apostles ordaining their successors, and these successors ordaining others, and so on, the grace of the Holy Spirit is handed down through all generations and enlightens all who obey their shepherds and teachers. St Gregory Palamas

Pentecost

The Voice of the Lord is full of Power

Not everything in the New Testament is "new". The feast of Pentecost is a good example. It did not begin with the descent of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. It is an Old Testament feast too. **Both take place** on mountains. Mt Sinai is the scene of the first. Pentecost in Acts 2 takes place on Mt. Zion…In Jerusalem. **Both events** have serious weather patterns: Sinai has thunder and lightning, smoke and fire, an earthquake. **Again**, the Lord descends in fire in Exodus 19:16 and appears like a "devouring fire" on top of the mountain in Exodus 24:17. Even for people who witnessed a lot of miracles, this had to be more than awe inspiring.

The word "thunder" as used in the book of Exodus can be translated as "voices" – "qol" in Hebrew. This is the same word used to describe the sound made when God descends into the Garden of Eden after the original sin of Adam and Eve. It is not just any old voice. If you look at Psalm 29 you see the "***qol***" or ***voice*** of the Lord, *breaks the cedars…flashes forth flames of fire…shakes the wilderness…makes the oaks to whirl and strips the forests bare*.

The thunders or voice of the Lord is intense! That is the same thing going on in Acts 2 with the rushing wind. What do the people in Jerusalem hear? The voices of the Apostles proclaiming the glory of the Lord in different languages…after what…after the tongues of fire descend upon them in a parallel way as to the descending of fire in Exodus 19. At Sinai the Israelites received a law written on stone – the Ten Commandments. At Pentecost the people received a law written on the human heart (**Jeremiah 31:31**).

Pentecost marks the beginning of the reconstituted People of God

All the languages being spoken by the Apostles which are understood by the people, is the reverse of what happened back in **Genesis 11** at the Tower of Babel where all the languages were confused and everyone dispersed. We are told how wicked they are and how they want to make a name for themselves and build the tower trying to reach heaven. Now at Pentecost they can all understand the Gospel and are being brought back together.

At Sinai, after the people receive the law of the Lord, they swear a covenant with God. One more covenant in a Bible that is partly a story of covenants as God works on bringing us back into the family, out of which Adam had been expelled. God makes covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David as the family of God gets bigger again. All of these Old Testament covenants are finally fulfilled in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ where the family of God is no longer dictated by natural bloodlines, but through the blood of Jesus Christ. The whole Bible is about the divine family life. It is about us being drawn into the family of God for which we were made. Indeed, the Trinity itself is a covenant family.

God is our Father because ***He*** has sworn a covenant with us. God has been swearing a series of covenants with humanity from the beginning. All the covenants reach their final moments in the New Covenant sacrifice of Jesus Christ which is designed to make us sons and daughters of God, children of the one Heavenly Father. That is for what we were made. That is who God designed us to be – His forever.

In Jesus there is a New Covenant made with us by God

When the Israelites arrive at Sinai, they eventually swear a covenant with God. He says they will be His people if they follow the commands He has given them. They receive the law of the covenant and commit themselves obedience: *all the Lord has spoken we will do*. Then comes a covenant oath ceremony where Moses sacrifices two oxen and sprinkles half of the blood on the altar and half of the blood on the people. This is a very serious ceremony that often accompanied the swearing of covenants. The sacrifice of the animal symbolised what would happen if someone broke the covenant. They are basically saying, let it be done to us what was done to the oxen if we break this covenant.

Then, forty days after they swear a blood oath to God, they break it. They sin. Moses comes down the mountain, sees what is going on and asks “Who is on the Lord’s side?” His kinsmen, the Levites, come to his side and he says "slay the idolaters". And we read that 3000 people die that day. What we do not understand about that in today’s world is that according to the terms of the covenant, they ***all*** **should have died**. They ***all*** swore a blood oath that they would not worship other gods. But then, a little more than a month later that is exactly what they are doing. But ***only*** 3,000 die. All deserve death but only some die.

At the foot of Sinai, the people of Israel become the people of God. When break their covenant, 3,000 of them are put to death. Now fast forward to Pentecost. A similar scene plays out with all the parallels already mentioned. But instead of calling out the sin of the people and then having to kill the idolaters as Moses did, Peter preaches the first homily in the history of the Church, and the people are “cut to the heart” says Acts 2:37, and there were ***added*** that day **about three thousand souls**.

Did you notice how many people came into the church that day? 3,000. In other words, the 3,000 lost through the broken covenant at the foot of Sinai in the old Israel is restored to the New Israel – the Church - because of the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. This is the birth of the reconstituted people of God. What was dead has been brought back to life through the power of the Holy Spirit, a power we experience in the sacraments. And that is Pentecost.