

# A Letter from Fr. Jerry Gunderson

June 8, 2025

Dear Friends,

Although we celebrate Pentecost at the end of the Easter Season, the account of Pentecost is at the beginning of the book of Acts. Raymond Brown, the great scripture scholar, called Pentecost “The once and future Spirit.” The account describes speech in different languages. When the disciples receive the Holy Spirit, although they speak in different tongues, foreigners readily understand. The disciples speak in ways previously beyond them.

It should be no surprise that St Luke records important speeches by Peter, by Stephen, the first Martyr, and by Paul. Of course, there was no stenographer or tape recorder. St. Luke, the historian inspired by God, is most likely the speechwriter. He’s telling the story of the church for future generations.

When he arrived in Athens, Paul gave a speech to a group of philosophers. Its importance lies in the fact that Middle Eastern Christianity is now encountering the Greek world for the first time. This was not just a language change, but a dialogue between two very different cultures.

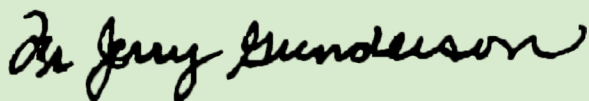
Greeks were highly educated philosophers who loved to discuss and debate. They were religious people who carved statues and erected temples to the Greek gods. They were not monotheists. The challenge to Paul was how to communicate the gospel in ways that would turn them to Christ.

The encounter took place at the Areopagus, a location near the Parthenon where philosophers discussed and debated issues of the day. Observing a Greek altar inscription “to an unknown God,” Paul says, “What you unknowingly worship, I proclaim to you.” He then tells the story of Jesus. The truth that Paul proclaims gets varied reactions.

Athens represents an early encounter between the truth of the gospel and the many aspects of the world it was destined to transform. It was not the first nor the last such encounter between the gospel of Jesus and different cultures. Jesus anticipated many such encounters.

Speaking on the night before he died, Jesus said to his disciples, “I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now.” What did Jesus mean? The situations and experiences of future generations were beyond the grasp of the disciples gathered at the Last Supper. They couldn’t yet imagine the challenge of the Reformation, the aftermath of U.S. slavery, the Industrial Revolution, or the emergence of Artificial Intelligence. Similarly, the issues that will challenge future generations are also beyond our knowing right now.

But Jesus also said, “When the Spirit comes, he will guide you to all truth.” These days it is hard to know what’s true and what is not true. But one thing I know is that the gospel of Jesus is true and we can rely on it. The Holy Spirit is poured out to “lead us to all truth.” Situations change, challenges arise, people suffer, but the truth of Jesus leads the church in a continuing Pentecost.



Fr. Jerry Gunderson