

# The Holy Spirit Province NEWSLETTER



18 May 2021

## A PENTECOST REFLECTION

Today, Pentecost Sunday, the Feast of the Holy Spirit, we might well ask ourselves again: Who is the Holy Spirit and what does the Holy Spirit do? Let's begin by doing some remembering. If, as a child, we learned about the 'Holy Spirit' (the 'Holy Ghost' for some of us who are older), what picture or impression did we get of that person? How do we think of the Holy Spirit today? Is the idea of the Holy Spirit elusive, fascinating, or what? Does the Holy Spirit come to Catholics only? To Christians only? Can someone be influenced by the Spirit, and not realize it?

So, just who is the Holy Spirit? 'God is love' (1 Jn 4:8, 16), the bible says emphatically. As love, God is Father, God is Son, and God is Holy Spirit. As a distinct but connected person, the Spirit is the living and mutual bond of love between the Father and the Son. So, the Spirit lives in God, in an ongoing relationship with the Father and the Son. But the Spirit also lives in people. We call the Spirit of God that dwells in us the 'Holy Spirit' because he/she makes us good and holy. The Spirit, in fact, gradually changes us, transforms us. This is to say that the Spirit humanizes us, makes us more truly ourselves, our best selves, helping us to realize our potential to be more genuine and authentic people. The Holy Spirit even makes us somewhat divine, by making us more like God.

We find many references in the bible to the 'Spirit of God'. There the word 'spirit' means literally breath, air, or wind. In a poetic story in the Book of Genesis, chapter 1, about how God made the world, we read that 'a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.' This suggests that God is not far away and disconnected from us but as near and close and intimate to us as the wind in the trees, the breath of our mouths, and the air that we breathe. It suggests the power of God at work in the creation of the universe, and God's continuing and life supporting presence to everything and everyone God has made. We recognize the power of the Spirit as God's life-giving breath in the words of that old hymn: 'O breathe on me, O Breath of God, fill me with life anew; that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.'

The expression 'the Spirit of God', also suggests the power of God at work at the first Pentecost. Luke sets the scene for the coming of the Spirit to the Infant Church in his words: 'When Pentecost day came round, the apostles had all met in one room when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting' (Acts 2:1-2).

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Over the centuries, believers have experienced the influence and power of the Spirit of God in a variety of ways. These experiences have led to a variety of names for the Spirit. Jesus calls the Spirit the 'Paraclete', the 'Advocate' (Jn 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7) i.e., the one who is on our side, the consoler, the comforter. He speaks too of 'the Spirit of truth' (Jn 16:13), the one who reminds us of the truth about Jesus and the truth which he taught. Paul speaks of the 'Spirit of Christ' (Rom 8:9) and the 'Spirit of the Lord' (2 Cor 3:17). Paul implies that the same Spirit which motivated, animated, energized, and filled the person of Jesus, and led him to go about doing good - loving, healing, and helping - has been put into us. In other words, you and I have been given the Spirit of Jesus to help us become good and loving people, and do good, loving, helping, and healing things. Just like Jesus!

Believers have also found a range of symbols to express their experience of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. Water has expressed the action of the Holy Spirit at Baptism. Just as our first birth is from water, so our birth into the life of the church and the life of God takes place in water blessed, enlivened, and energized by the Holy Spirit. So, in the Nicene Creed we pray at Mass, we call the Holy Spirit 'the Lord and giver of life.' Pouring out the oil of chrism on candidates at confirmation and ordination has signified pouring out the Holy Spirit on them for their tasks either of being a Christian, or being a Christian leader. Fire has symbolized the energy of the Holy Spirit, which consumes and transforms what it touches. John the Baptist announces Christ as the one 'who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire' (Lk 1:17; 3:16). Jesus says of the Spirit: 'I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already' (Lk 12:49). On the morning of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit rests on the first disciples in the form of 'tongues of fire' and fills them with the same Spirit. Fire is one of the most expressive images of the Spirit's action. So much so that Paul warns us not to put out the fire of the Spirit when he says: 'Do not quench the Spirit' (1 Thess 5:19). The laying on hands by the Apostles, and by bishops since, e.g., by Archbishop O'Regan on Fr Tony Simbel CP in Adelaide, Australia, a few days ago, has been a sign of the giving of the Spirit to people entrusted with a mission of loving service to others (cf. Acts 8:17-19; 13:3; 19:6). When Jesus comes up from the water of his baptism, the Holy Spirit comes down upon him in the form of a dove, and remains with him (Mt 3:16 par.). Ever since, Christian art has been representing the hovering, abiding presence of the Spirit, in the form of a dove.

It is the Spirit in our church community and in each of us who makes us aware of Jesus Christ, both as he was on earth and as he is now, risen and glorious, with God and with us. It is the Spirit who reveals Jesus to us as the visible image, the outward reflection or mirror of the invisible God, as God's human face. It is the Spirit who reminds us of the teachings and values of Jesus, and helps us to live them in our personal and community situations. It is the Spirit who makes present to us in each of the seven sacraments the power of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and brings us into a deep sharing of love with both God and one another. So much so that St Cyril of Alexandria has said: 'All of us who have received one and the same Spirit, are in a sense blended together with one another and with God.' The refrain of a well known hymn, sums this up in a beautiful way when it says, 'where there is charity and love,

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there the God of love abides'. St Paul has left us with a brilliant list of down-to-earth ways in which the Spirit is constantly present and active in people – a kind of checklist! 'What the Spirit brings is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and selfcontrol ...' (Gal 5:22-23).

Australian theologian Tony Kelly has written: 'The more we go out of ourselves in love, and leave behind the deadly isolation of "the heart of stone" for the vitality of the "heart of flesh," the more we share in the Spirit of God's own loving.' In a nutshell, therefore, as Paul insists: 'Since the Spirit is our life, let us be directed by the Spirit.' In our prayer together for the Feast, then, let us keep saying to God for ourselves and others: 'Send forth your Spirit upon us and we shall be recreated, and you shall renew the face of the earth.'

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