

## Pentecost

### 5.28.23

When you pray, whom do you pray to? I'm guessing most Catholics would respond that they pray to Jesus. After some thought, others might respond with a bit more theological nuance and say that they pray to the Father through the Son, Jesus Christ. Still others might speak of their fondness of popular piety by saying that they pray to Mary. With a bit of prodding, this last group might refine their answer to say that their prayer to Mary is a request that she intercede for them, in the same way that we ask a family member or friend to remember us in their prayers.

More than likely, very few Catholics would say that they pray to the Holy Spirit. Some might say that the Holy Spirit is the forgotten stepchild of the Holy Trinity. The fact of the matter is all prayer involves the Holy Spirit. All the good work we do in the name of God is possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we turn our attention to God in prayer, when we ask God to walk with us when facing a challenge, when we rejoice in a particular blessing that has come our way, all that happens because we are animated and sated by the Holy Spirit. We don't have to worry about knowing which person of the Trinity to pray to. In fact, all prayers of petition, sorrow, or thanksgiving are directed to God revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

On this Solemnity of Pentecost, the scriptures reveal the various ways the Spirit is with us. In the gospel, which describes that Sunday evening when Jesus rose from the dead, Jesus appears to the fear-filled disciples gathered in the Upper Room. Knowing their fear and perceiving their lack, Jesus **breathes** on them. That act depicts Jesus giving those disciples his very life. And his life has the power to forgive and to fortify.

This act parallels the creation account found in the Book of Genesis. God formed Adam from the clay of the earth. He then **breathed** his life into him. Adam was animated by the life-breath of God.

We are given the same life-breath of God on a variety of occasions and in a variety of ways. It comes to us in a particular way through our participation in the sacraments. It is with us in our times of prayer and in the works of charity we offer to our sisters and brothers.

In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear a different sort of account about the disciples gathered in that Upper Room after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The writer of that account describes the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples like a **strong, driving wind**. That **wind** is the life-breath of God which descends on each of those gathered there. The experience was so powerful that it motivated the disciples to go out to foreign peoples and lands to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, freely and fearlessly.

The power of that wind – that is, the presence and movement of the Holy Spirit – is familiar to us. It is the same Spirit and power of God which enables us to stand up for what is right; to volunteer for ministries which might be outside our comfort zone. It is that Spirit which moves us to embrace the sacrament of ordination or the sacrament of matrimony when many of those around us think that doing so is crazy.

And finally, in the second reading from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, we hear that the Spirit comes upon us bringing us gifts that are unique to us. Those gifts are particularly designed for each of us and the ministry we will engage in. That Spirit is what enables us to do things which we once thought of as impossible.

This reading should make us think about what specific gifts God has given to us for service in his Church. It should also inspire us to pray that we generously use those gifts to build up his Kingdom for the betterment of his people.

As I reflect on the power of the Holy Spirit on this Pentecost Sunday, the following example comes to mind. When I was younger, I loved body surfing in the Atlantic Ocean on the south Jersey shore. For me, the bigger the wave, the more exhilarating the ride. On a few occasions, I body-surfed some huge waves.

More than once, that wave would take me under. I would tumble around in the surf and scrape my nose and my knees on the sand. I found it difficult to get to the surface. I found it harder to hold my breath. But when I finally reached the shore, I pulled myself up from the surf and sand – breathless and sometimes bloody. I'd take a deep, life-giving, and re-invigorating breath. Filled once again with air and with life, I'd swim back into the deeper water, looking for the next big wave I could ride to shore.

Our prayer and the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives is like that. The Holy Spirit fills us with life. The Holy Spirit animates and heartens our being. The Holy Spirit empowers us to do the next seemingly crazy thing in God's name and for the Kingdom.

May the exhilarating power of the Holy Spirit animate you, sustain you, and carry you through the rough surf of life – on this Solemnity of Pentecost and all your days.

Amen? Amen!