



**HOLY SPIRIT**

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**PENTECOST SUNDAY (MAY 11, 2008)**

**ACTS 2:1-11; I COR 12:3-7.12-14; JN 20:19-23**

**FR. VINCE ALAGIA, S.J.**

**COME, HOLY SPIRIT, COME**

**Pentecost is the celebration of the birth of the Church. The Life Principal of God, the Holy Spirit, transformed a group of confused, imperfect but passionate followers of Jesus into a less confused, less imperfect but most likely more passionate members of the Body of Christ, the Church. Without the Holy Spirit we would just be another organization among organizations. With the Holy Spirit all of us possess a vital spiritual life, and today we celebrate our spiritual life principle, the Holy Spirit in us. We want to ask God to help us use that sharing of the Spirit each of us has so that the whole community might experience a deeper presence of the Lord – and this world because of us.**

**Pentecost was a Jewish feast to celebrate the harvest, a sign of God's faithfulness to his people and their response of gratitude. In Exodus, it is written that during this feast all the men should present themselves before the Lord God. So we read in today's first reading of so many people gathered together from various parts of the world. The Apostles gathered as well to celebrate this feast of God's faithfulness and good harvests. And we gather to celebrate this feast of God's faithful and good harvests in our regard. As the seeds had been planted and the sun and rain nourished them, and the earth yielded saving wheat for this agricultural community, so we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit with prayers to bring forth new fruit. God continues to be faithful to his people, continues by the sending of the Spirit of fruitfulness in amazing and mysterious ways.**

**In Genesis we read about the confusion of tongues as a result of human pride and self-deification. One of the effects of the hovering Spirit is the beginning, or remembering, of God's once fractured people. Distinctions**

caused by a breakdown in communication between God and humans and between humans and humans continue to be healed by the Holy Spirit. We celebrate today a new beginning as the Holy Spirit continues the healing work of bringing God and people together in and through us. While there are differences of language and culture, the work of our becoming one began with new fervor on this day centuries ago and continues into our own time with us.

John's Gospel presents the first Easter appearance of Jesus to his disciples and the sending or breathing of the Spirit upon the disciples as happening on the same day. The disciples are gathered together and while they would otherwise have been celebrating the day, instead they are fearful, shameful, hiding, and locked in a room because of their own sense of infidelity. Into this human condition, Jesus comes with his greeting of *"Peace."*

The *"peace"* he offers has a hook to it. All is forgiven but with forgiveness comes fresh responsibilities and efforts to be forgiving and faithful. Jesus loves his community and our humanity even as he finds it broken but will not leave it the way he finds it – then or now. This *"peace"* is not the same as complacency or that no war is going on within us or around us. On the contrary, this *"peace"* is a *"peace"* that only the Lord can give and begins in the heart.

Instead of their being banished or imprisoned for their having abandoned him and their commitment to him, he finds them, blesses them and sends them out to continue his mission of finding, blessing, and sending. He could see in their hearts what they themselves were not able to see clearly, a new sense of faithfulness and mission. He breathes new life into his followers. These fragile humans are the 'first fruits,' or gathering of the spiritual wheat which begins a new harvest for God.

*"As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."* Pentecost is a call to ministry and service, the call conferred on when we Christians received the Sacrament of

**Confirmation. This call to love with hearts filled and ready to offer forgiveness was not something to be reserved for only a special few in the community, but for all of those who would be disciples. And this same call is ours today as a faith community upon whom the Spirit of God breathes.**

**God's Spirit leads us wisely, gives us strength, and reverence of all life, and we are charged to bear fruit: to be loving, to be instruments of peace, patient with ourselves and others, compassionate in our thoughts, words and actions – to mention but a few of the Fruits of the Gifts of the Spirit offered us.**

**For some this means witnessing the Gospel by exercising high-profile, visible public leadership in the Church or in the wider community is an important responsibility of stewardship. And it means I know my responsibilities in whatever state of life is mine. We are all called to use what God has given to the best of our respective abilities no matter how large or small. It means hearing the call of the Lord's Spirit who moves me to action.**

**For some it means living out the hidden life, as Jesus did for almost 30 years, carrying out a very routine day of duties and responsibilities in an extraordinary way, making an ordinary, humdrum daily life extraordinary in God's eyes. It means that I live with the conscious realization that I am able to bring love, joy, be an instrument of peace, the Fruits of the Spirit to a family member, to a friend, to a child, to a stranger, in a quiet way, hardly being noticed, or maybe not noticed at all.**

**The feast of Pentecost invites us to carry out our confirmation calling with passion. We all have gifts, different gifts, which we are called to share with and because of others in need that we might complete the work of the Kingdom left by God for us to do with the presence of the Holy Spirit, His Spirit, living within us.**

**There is one problem. We can deny the following the call of the Spirit. We can refuse to develop our talents and abilities to make our lives better spiritually. It is not so much that we will not do some good, but, for**

example, a person with a facility in math or science can become a doctor just to make a lot of money, not help others. We can turn in on ourselves and be so taken with our personal needs that we never fulfill the purpose of our existence. When selfish motives dominate our lives we can even lose the ability to say *“Jesus is Lord”* because we have given up the Holy Spirit

As I said, though, today, this Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate our spiritual life principle, the Holy Spirit. We ask God to help us use the individual sharing of the Spirit we have so that the whole community might experience a deeper presence of the Lord.

Nobel Prize winner, Dr. Alexis Carrel, wrote a book years ago called *Man the Unknown*. In it he makes this striking statement we might keep in mind in our prayers to the Spirit: “Prayer is the most powerful form of energy we can generate... The influence of prayer on the human mind and body is as demonstrable as secreting glands... Only in prayer do we achieve that complete and harmonious assembly of body, mind, and spirit which gives the frail human reed its unshakable strength.”

To conclude, and once more to move forwards in our journey, let us pray a simple prayer for the wisdom and love of Christ’s Spirit, Who is the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit,  
fill the hearts of your faithful,  
and kindles in us the fire of your love.  
Send forth your Spirit  
and we shall be created.  
And you will renew the face of the earth.

Amen