

Pentecost Sunday - To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

May 31, 2020.

The story of the coming of the Holy Spirit in an almost visible form is one of the most dramatic stories in the New Testament. In John's Gospel this Sunday (20:19-23), the gift of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' disciples seems to be part and parcel of their initial experience of Jesus' resurrection. ***"When it was evening on that day, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you" when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*** If our liturgical calendar followed strictly John's picture, we would be celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit on Easter Sunday evening.

The first reading (Acts 2:1-11) describes the Church's first Pentecost with some spectacular fireworks. When the Apostles and other Christians were gathered "in one place together", a thunderous noise like a strong wind, like a tornado, came from the sky. And then flames of fire just appeared out of nowhere, spontaneously, hovering in the air until they came to rest on each of the people gathered. But the fireworks didn't stop there. All of a sudden the Christians started speaking in languages that they didn't know. In either way, it shows that the Lord fulfills his promise: the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, on us and on generations to come. But what is the normal way the Holy Spirit will come on our life? Dramatic fireworks? No, on the contrary, God's action in our life is most often gentle and hardly perceptible at first. How does Jesus send the Spirit to his Apostles after his resurrection? He breathes on them - quietly and subtly. St. Paul describes the action of the Holy Spirit in us, the Church: to giving gifts to all believers: In his First Letter to the Corinthians, (1 Corinthians 12:4-7), St Paul says: ***"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."*** Like the soul of a body - powerful, essential, but invisible and subtle. The Holy Spirit works quietly on each of us. It is poured out upon the whole world at every moment in every created thing, never limited to place and time. It is a constant and dynamic reality, especially in the Church.

Two weeks ago, I talked about Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony. I think the Church is like a symphony orchestra. A symphony orchestra is made up of hundreds of different musicians and dozens of instruments. The conductor is the visible focus of everyone's attention, both the musicians and the audience. And yet, is the conductor the real source of the music? No, the composer is and in case of the Church, God is. In front of every musician is a music stand holding a few pages of the score, the music. No one in the audience sees the score, but that score is what brings all those minds together, coordinates everyone's efforts, and produces a beautiful, inspiring performance. Do you think that's what the Church is like just as St Paul says: ***"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."*** The Pope is the conductor, guaranteed by God to stay faithful to the music score. We are all musicians, contributing our own unique talents from the Lord to the symphony of holiness that resounds throughout the world and history. And the Holy Spirit is the living music score, the one who tells us what notes to play, when to play them and how to play them: fast or slow, loud or soft, high or low.

When I was young, our family friend and parish pastor told me The Holy Spirit is like a **dove**. He said this dove bearing an olive branch flew back to old Noah on his Ark, signalling the good news of dry land after the great Flood. This Dove also descends upon Jesus at his Baptism, according to Luke's Gospel (3:21-22). I love white dove. It suggests innocence, purity

and peace. Certainly the Holy Spirit is deeply involved in purifying our hearts and minds so that we "*may have in us the same mind that was in Christ Jesus,*" as St. Paul says. Certainly the Holy Spirit is actively engaged in us in peaceful ways whenever we work through conflicts great and small toward the goal of reconciliation. This same quiet but powerful style is well illustrated by the famous **Holy Spirit Window in St Peter's Basilica**, in Rome. It is an oval window at the farthest end of the gigantic basilica. In the centre is a figure of a dove, and around the dove are twelve sections of translucent amber that look like twelve spokes in a wheel. It is the only coloured window in the entire building, and it quietly suffuses the immense space with a warm, golden light. ***Quiet and subtle, yet full of transforming power - that's how the Holy Spirit works.***

The Holy Spirit works quietly, but effectively. Like the life of a vine, which constantly but silently carries nutrients to every branch, invisibly producing luscious, visible fruit, the Holy Spirit is always gently inspiring us to follow Christ more closely, so that we can experience a truly abundant life. But unlike vines, this process doesn't happen automatically. It depends also on our free choice. That's why Jesus says in the Gospel, "***Whoever loves me will keep my word.***" We don't obey the Holy Spirit's inspirations like robots; we obey out of love, because we know that Christ will never lead us astray, and because we want to stay close to him. That is our part, to obey God's will. Like each musician in the orchestra, we have the scores in front of us, but we must consciously choose to play those notes. And since the Holy Spirit typically works quietly, we have to pay close attention. We have to make a point of listening to him, of consulting him when we have decisions to make or doubts to resolve. He guides us from within, the way magnetism guides a compass. But unless we frequently look to see where that compass is pointing, we will never reach the destination we long for. ***Today, let's renew our commitment to pay attention - not in order to experience spiritual fireworks, but in order to feed the fire of God's love in our hearts, whose light and heat we all need so much.***