

PENTECOST SUNDAY

THE RETURN TO ORDINARY TIME

- May 15 THE SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST**
The Spirit's New Creation In Us
A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller
- MON 16 Monday of the Seventh Week in Ordinary Time**
The Spirit's Work Through Us
A reflection taken from a text by Jurgen Moltmann
- TUES 17 Tuesday of the Seventh Week in Ordinary Time**
The Spirit's Renewal of the Church
A reflection developed from a sermon of St. Pope Leo the Great
- WED 18 Wednesday of the Seventh Week of Ordinary Time**
The Spirit's Presence within Us
A reflection developed form St. Augustine's Commentary
on the First Letter of John
- THURS 19 Thursday of the Seventh Week in Ordinary Time**
Seeing All with the Heart of Christ
A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Oger, disciple of
St. Bernard
- FRI 20 Friday of the Seventh Week in Ordinary Time**
Loving Self-Surrender to the Spirit
A reflection from The Mirror of Faith by Wm. of St. Thierry
- SAT 21 Memorial of Our Lady**
Mary Shows us the Way to God
A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Chromatius of
Aquileia
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The Spirit's New Creation in Us

A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

The Feast of Pentecost in Israel was a celebration of the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai and this was understood as the creation of Israel as a Chosen People. God created Israel by sending the Holy Spirit. In Genesis God creates the world by sending the Spirit upon a primeval chaos of waters. When God created Saul Israel's king he had him encounter a group of prophets possessed by the Spirit and when the Spirit came upon Saul he became "another person", a new person. Today we celebrate the Holy Spirit's creating a New Israel, the Church, by a new sending of the Spirit to make each and all of us "new persons".

Most accounts of Pentecost don't make much of the sound of a "mighty wind" that filled the house where the disciples were, and the whole neighborhood where the house was. It sounded as though the mightiest hurricane or tornado ever was blowing right inside that house, yet without destroying anything! Winds can be a terribly destructive force and to hear the sound without those effects, to track it down to a single house, that blew their minds!

'Spirit' in Hebrew means 'wind' and "powerful wind". God was recreating Israel and the entire world by sending the Divine Power in its fullness. How did they know it was God's power? Because here came a parade of people out of the house speaking in all sorts of languages and praising God, yet everyone could understand them! God was reversing what had happened at the Tower of Babel. God was bringing together rather than separating, causing understanding not division. Yet the gifts of the Spirit caused problems.

Paul lists a whole series of gifts to members of the church of Corinth. The result of these gifts was that this church was divided. People envied other's gifts, using them to compete for attention and prestige. Worse, the divisions between the rich and the poor or Jews and non-Jews or between the free and the enslaved were not overcome. Paul found it terribly frustrating. He finally cries out: "*If I have faith strong enough to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing!*" The gifts are to be used in loving service to one another and should complement one another. But that didn't happen because people weren't ready to bear what they had been taught to avoid, suffering and pain; they weren't ready to forgive and love those who "caused" them to suffer by having what they lacked.

When Jesus came to the Twelve after his resurrection and gave them the Spirit, he first showed them his hands and side. The marks cried out that we need to suffer for one another. He endured patiently and lovingly all his passion involved. We too have a passion to live, but with like patience and love. This experience is intended to free us from the values and ways of "the world". But will we try to use the Spirit's gifts to support "worldly ways" of thinking and acting and practicing what we call "one up man ship". Are we ready to allow the Spirit to change every form of such thinking and behaving in our lives, and in our community? Are we always ready to forgive in the name of our all-loving and merciful God? If not fighting breaks out instead of peace and division rather than unity.

The Spirit's Work Through Us

A reflection taken from a text by Jurgen Moltmann

“Jesus said: If you love me you will keep my commandments and I shall ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever.” (John 14:15ff) The gift and the presence of the Holy Spirit is the most magnificent and wonderful thing that can happen to us, to the human community, and to our earth. The Holy Spirit is not just one of the spirits in our world but is God in person. It is the God who creates and gives life and redeems and blesses. In the Holy Spirit the end of the history of guilt, of suffering and of death has begun.

“*And it shall come to pass later...*,” says the prophet Joel, in words that Jesus’ disciples understood as pointing to what they experienced at Pentecost. They had experienced the first days of a new creation of the world and the fulfillment of prophecy. Pentecost is thus not an appendix and addition to Good Friday and Easter. Pentecost is the goal of Jesus’ death on the Cross and his resurrection by God into the glory that had now come.

Where the Holy Spirit is, God is present in a special way. We experience God acting in our lives and are thus quickened by a source that draws on sources deeper than any in our merely human being. We experience life in a new way, we experience redemption—complete and in its entirety—and do it with all our being. We feel and taste and touch and see ourselves living in God and God living in our lives. The Holy Spirit is rightly called our “Comforter” and “fount of life”. In the Spirit we pray in a new way.

When you pray for the coming of the Spirit you open yourself to the expectation that the energy of the Spirit will flow into your life. Even if you can only groan for salvation from some situation, your groaning becomes the groaning of God’s Spirit within you seeking to come into your life of narrowness or some kind of imprisonment and to transform this devastated world we live in. These very groans are a first sign of new life and the beginning of transformation.

The Spirit’s response to such praying is to come and abide. The Spirit is poured out and indwells in us, and through us in our world. Whoever prays for the Holy Spirit to come and indwell—in one’s heart, in one’s community, in our shared earth—doesn’t want to flee from the earth to heaven. Such a one has hope for every heart, for every community, and for the earth. We do not pray “Let us come into your Kingdom” but “Let your Kingdom come on earth, and as it is in Heaven”. This is a magnificent affirmation of the life that God gives and that the Spirit is pouring into us fragile earthly human persons. Let the Spirit work the Great Transformation though your fragile life.

The Spirit's Renewal of the Church

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Pope Leo the Great

“As the Father sent me, so I am sending you! Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn. 20:19f). Every believer knows the celebration of Pentecost ranks as one of the Church’s most important, consecrated to giving thanks for the most sublime and wonderful gift of God, the Holy Spirit. Ten days after the Lord ascended high above even the heavens and took his seat at the right hand of God the Heavenly Father, and fifty days after his resurrection, that day of Pentecost dawned for us all. Through this feast we recall the great mysteries of the former dispensation and join them with the mysteries of the new. The grace that was heralded by the Law given through Moses becomes a sign as well of the grace that fulfills it.

Fifty days after the sacrifice of the lamb marking the deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt, the Law was given on Mount Sinai. Fifty days from the raising up of Christ after his passion and immolation as the perfect Lamb of God, the Holy Spirit came down upon the assembled believers and apostles. Thought- ful believers see that the covenant with Israel laid a foundation for the covenant that is the Gospel. The Spirit who is the author of the second covenant is the same Spirit who established the first.

“When the days of Pentecost were fulfilled and all the disciples were together in one place, suddenly there came from heaven a sound like that of a mighty driving wind and filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues like flames of fire which came to rest on each one of them, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as they Spirit gave them the power of utterance.” How swift the word of Wisdom; where God is teacher how quickly the lesson is learned! One needs no interpreter to understand and no practice in order to gain facility with the language; there is no time for study! The Spirit of truth breathes where he wills and each nation’s tongue is the common property of the Church.

The Spirit recreates the world in re-creating the community of his Chosen. Since that day, the call of the Gospel has rung out, a rain of charisms, a river of blessings, has watered every desert and dry place. The Spirit of God that swept over the waters in the beginning has returned to renew the face of the earth. In the light of the flaming tongues resting on all those disciples of the Lord the light and word of God has shown out clearly. The Spirit would kindle a fiery eloquence charged with the energy to enlighten and the ability to create understanding as well as the power to burn away all sin and destroy it.

This is the vocation of the Church, the new Chosen People of God. But the Church can fulfill its call only if its members allow the Spirit to work its wonderful renewal in each of them. It is they who must speak in every earthly tongue and use it to proclaim the wondrous works of God. Our renewal is the new birth, the ever new birth, of the Church as proclaimer of salvation and instrument by which the Spirit will come to save and transform all things. The Spirit makes us into sharers in the sufferings of Christ for the salvation of the world. God creates his Church in us and in us God renews it day by day.

The Spirit's Presence within Us

A reflection from St. Augustine's Commentary on John's First Letter

God's commandment is this, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and that we love one another. This is God's own commandment and anyone who breaks it commits the sin that all children of God avoid. We realize that nothing else is enjoined on us except the love of one another. Whoever carries out this commandment abides in God and God abides in that person. We can tell that we are dwelling in God when we keep the commandment by the power of the Spirit given us.

Isn't it clear that it is the work of the Spirit to implant love and charity in human hearts? Isn't what the Apostle Paul says clear: "the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us"? It was out of charity that John spoke when he said that each of you ought to examine our own heart in the presence of God: "If our heart doesn't reproach us" then our heart bears witness that the Spirit's gift of love of our brothers and sisters is the source of any good work we do. He repeats the truth that abiding in God means loving one another in the Spirit that God has given us. If you find charity within you then you have the Spirit of God giving you understanding of what is most necessary.

How can we know whether or not we have received the Holy Spirit? We each have to question our own heart. If you love your brothers and sisters practically then the Spirit of God dwells in you. Examine and test yourself in God's sight. Discover whether you harbor in your heart a love of peace and unity, a love of the Church as it extends throughout the length and breadth of this present world. Don't look only for love of the brother or sister who is present with you, for we have many whom we do not see but with whom we are united in the Spirit.

This is nothing strange. We all belong to the One Body and we all have a single Head in Heaven. Not all are here with us now but all belong to one another in the one body. So if you would know whether you have received the Spirit ask your heart whether you have the outward sign of the sacrament of Christ's body and blood. Can you have it without the power of the sacrament? Ask your heart. If the love of your brothers and sisters is there you can be at peace. There can be no love without the Holy Spirit. "*The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which God has given us.*" These are words of the Apostle Paul. Now that we know what they mean we can know whether we are in God. We know what God causes those who let him live in him to do.

Seeing All with the Heart of Christ

A reflection developed from a sermon of St. Oger

The Holy Spirit who is called Advocate and Comforter is the counselor of all believers, and the defender and protector of all who hope in God. Without the Spirit there is neither strength nor holiness. The Spirit becomes the champion, as it were, of all who are destined for eternal glory.

When we speak of the Spirit comforting the afflicted we mean especially those who grieve for their sins and must suffer in consequence of them. They are distressed not only because they have messed up their lives by evil deeds but because they have shunned the love of Christ, the King of Glory. They are heartbroken because through their wrongs they have tried to set at naught, even though without realizing it, what our Savior died to accomplish. They weep over their inability to see the face of Christ who is the source of salvation and the only real hope of life.

The Spirit comforts all such persons. In this present life the Spirit gives them the consolation of hope as the Spirit will bring them to the blessed eternal joy that is the fulfillment of all hopes. The Spirit of Truth shuns all whose love does not reach beyond themselves. The Spirit's will is that Christ, and Christ alone as God, should be loved for his own sake. Our love for God must be total. God will have no rival but must be the sole object of our love. God has no rival in loving us, any more than he can be rivaled by anyone else's generosity. It is out of that generosity that he rewards with life all those who love Him alone.

Yet God desires to be loved in such a way that we love everything else together with God and love nothing apart from God. As the creator of all, God is the source of all created things. Every created thing that is good is good simply because God made it and made it good. In loving the good in created things, then, one loves their creator. We cannot love them truly if we love them for their own sake because by themselves they have no good to offer us. God gave them existence and goodness.

Anyone who loves gold or silver or material goods and possessions of any kind must love their creator. To love them apart from God is to be a stranger to God's goodness and generosity, and so to theirs. It is the giver of goodness that one must love in all created things—loving them in God. By loving God in this way we love everything else too, even while God is truly and really the sole object of our love.

No one is capable of seeing God, even in created things, if the eye of the soul is diseased. The inward vision has to be purified to perceive spiritual truth. This is what makes us worthy temples of the Holy Spirit. We must do all that we can to become so purified that we can see God in all things, when we have eyes only for God's glorious beauty. That is how Jesus knows all things, and knows God. Jesus knows by loving because his heart sees God everywhere. If we let this be done in us then we dwell with God even as Jesus dwells with the Heavenly Father. Let the Spirit purify your loving so that you can be with God for ever in the life that is unending joy and gladness.

Loving Self-Surrender to the Spirit

A reflection developed from The Mirror of Faith by Wm. of St. Thierry

Do you ever say, "How can these things be" when you hear of the mysteries of faith? Take courage. Don't ask the question contentiously but with a loving submission to your teacher, the Holy Spirit. Your question thus becomes a prayer and even an expression of love, piety and humble longing. We can't hope to explore the heights of divine reality but we can find salvation in the example and saving ways of acting we see in our savior.

Jesus says: "When the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send you from the Father, he will remind you of everything, and teach you all truth." Yes, who can know the mysteries of God except God's own Spirit? What we need to do is make all haste to share in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is with you when you call upon him. After all, you call only because the Spirit is already present. Yet the Spirit comes even more fully in answer to your prayers. The Spirit brings you an abundance of divine blessings. The Spirit is the river whose waters give joy to the city of God, as Scripture puts it.

If the Spirit comes and finds you humble, silent and even trembling at the words of God, then the Spirit will rest upon you and reveal what the Heavenly Father has hidden even from the wise and the prudent of this world. You will begin to understand the things of holy Wisdom which the Lord's disciples were unable to bear until the Spirit would come to teach them. They could not even learn from the lips of the Lord! So how could we hope to learn from any human person? Jesus himself tells us: God is Spirit. Those who would worship God truly must worship in "Spirit" and in Truth. Those who wish to know God must seek understanding of their faith in and through the Holy Spirit.

In the darkness and ignorance that go with this life on earth the Holy Spirit is the light which enlightens. The Spirit enlightens those who are "poor in spirit", humble in love and drawn onward by love, by the sweetness that draws everyone to God. God is the love of the loving. To have the Spirit dwelling in you is to have genuine devotion and piety. The Spirit reveals and draws believers on from one degree of faith to another, so that grace follows upon grace and that faith which comes from hearing human words gives way to a faith enlightened by that understanding only the Spirit can give. This is the understanding that gives birth to love in all its depth and richness. It is the gift God wishes to give you. Turn to God in humble and loving surrender of yourself, day by day, and you will find this gift given you in overwhelming abundance.

Mary Shows us the Way to God

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Chromatius of Aquileia

At the time of our Lord's ascension into Heaven the Church seems to have consisted of about 120 persons. Yet it has grown to such an extent that it is found everywhere throughout the world; it consists in an almost uncountable multitude of persons. The Lord himself foretold this when he said, "*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit*". The Lord's resurrection from the dead following his passion has indeed borne much fruit for the salvation of the human race.

It was to his own body that Jesus referred to when he spoke about how a grain of wheat dies in order to bear fruit. On being buried in the earth, and then rising, this body yields a harvest beyond all measure. It does this through its fruits of holiness in surrender to God. From this comes the holiness of believers throughout the world.

The death of the one Jesus has become the source offering life to all as it shows all the way to holiness in doing the Heavenly Father's will. The Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus says, is like a mustard seed. It is tiny and yet when planted in the earth it grows to become the largest of shrubs. It becomes a kind of tree in whose branches birds can find shelter. The God of majesty and glory made himself even smaller than a mustard seed in the virgin's womb. He seeks to plant in each of us the seed which is himself. It may seem tiny but it will grow into something great.

We are told that after our Lord and Savior had conquered death by rising from the grave, ascending into Heaven, he gathered his Church in the upper room where he had celebrated his last supper. It was a relatively small group including his mother, Mary and his brethren. Unless the mother and the brethren of the Lord were there such an assembly could not claim the name of Church. Only where Christ's virginal incarnation is preached and believed is the Church to be found and only where those of his brethren who were apostles preach is the good news of the Gospel heard.

The Good News is that God has become a human being and leads us all to give our human lives and selves to God. We see this truth in Jesus' mother and brethren. Only as we give ourselves to God's grace and election, as Mary did, can we be united with God, not simply physically but in Jesus and in loving as Jesus loved. Mary shows us ourselves as God calls us to become. Mary shows us how God draws close to us and transforms us into other Christs. To this the apostles bear witness by their lives and deaths and preaching.

God wants to plant a seed of grace in your life. God wants to make it grow into a tree where many can find shelter. God wants to do in and through you what God did in and through Mary. As a virgin she was wholly dependent on God to bring about his will in and through her in conception and child bearing. God calls us to depend on his grace and will just as completely. Only with her and imitating her gift of self to our God do we come to be true Christians.