

Pentecost: the Gift of God's Spirit and the Birth of the Church



(Design drawn by Sr. Mildred Mary Neuzil.)

The Catholic Church teaches that the fathomless mystery we call God has revealed Himself to humankind as a Trinity of Persons – The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. ... All effects of God's action upon his creatures are produced by the three divine Persons in common. But because certain effects of the divine action in creation remind us more of one divine Person than another, the Church ascribes particular effects to one or the other divine Person. Thus, we speak of the Father as Creator of all that is, of the Son, the Word of God, as our Savior or Redeemer, and of the Holy Spirit – the love of God “poured into our hearts” – as our Sanctifier. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 249-256; 234-237.)

The concept of God as a Trinity of three distinct persons in the unity of one Godhead is mystery to the human mind. God revealed it to us over time through His works that are more tangible to human understanding through our senses. First, God established the age of glory of the Father Who created the universe and mankind, formed a concrete people as His own, made a Covenant with them, and carved His Law in stone to guide them. He promised a Savior, a Perfect Sacrifice that would atone for all sin and would reopen the gates of Heaven that were closed to all by Adam's sin. In the fullness of time, God unfolded the age of glory of the Son, the Promised Messiah whose death made perfect satisfaction for sin and reconciled us to the Father, and whose Resurrection is a promise of our own resurrection into the eternal glory of our Triune God. When Jesus ascended to His Father, He sent a new Advocate Who was poured out on those awaiting Him on that first Pentecost, inaugurating the age of glory of the Holy Spirit Who would be made manifest in Christ's Church, the New Ark of His New Covenant, and would effect our transformation into the image of the Son that is so pleasing to the Father, an image that is our key to the house of the Father when He recognizes us as His own. There is no greater glory!

St. Paul used this theme of unfolding glory to refer to the revelation of the Trinity in human history, and to refer to the quiet work of the Spirit in each soul, bringing it from one level of glory and union with God to another. Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity took this theme from St. Paul and developed her mystical doctrine of **Laudem Gloriam**, “in praise of glory,” the virtuous progression from “glory to glory” in our union with God.

The Old Testament proclaimed the Father clearly, but the Son more obscurely. The New Testament revealed the Son and gave us a glimpse of the divinity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells among us and grants us a clearer vision of Himself. It was not prudent, when the divinity of the Father had not yet been confessed, to proclaim the Son openly and, when the divinity of the Son was not yet admitted, to add the Holy Spirit as an extra burden, to speak somewhat daringly.... By advancing and progressing "from glory to glory," the light of the Trinity will shine in ever more brilliant rays. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #684.)

We have many symbols to describe the work of the Holy Spirit who brings to completion the work begun in us by the Father through creation and by the Son through redemption. It is the Spirit who sanctifies us and leads us from glory to glory until we reach the beatific vision in heaven. Theologians call the time before Christ the age of the Father, the time from Christ's birth until Pentecost the age of the Son, and the time from Pentecost until the end of time, the age of the Holy Spirit and the age of the Church. The Church was founded by Christ and is guided by the Spirit of God to be a Holy Mother to us until Jesus comes again in all His glory.

The Hebrew word for Spirit is "ruah", meaning wind, breath, air. The Book of Genesis tells the story of creation but the distinction of persons in the Trinity is veiled. God creates the heavens and the earth from a vast wasteland covered in darkness while a mighty wind sweeps over the waters. At God's word, creation came into being. God as Father initiates the action; the Word spoken is the Son, the Logos or image of the Father and prototype of all creation; and the wind is the Spirit Who stirs the waters to provide life for all that is created. The Father is the focus in the Genesis creation story, but in John's Gospel, the focus is on the Son, the Word Who existed from the beginning and in and through Whom all things were made. John proclaims that all who accept the Son become children of God, not by way of natural generation but by the power of the Spirit through the Word made flesh in the womb of Mary over whom the Spirit hovered. This is our sanctifying grace, divine sonship by way of adoption in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit is the bond of love between Father and Son, so is He the bond of love between us and God, whereby we call Christ's Father our father, too.

At Pentecost, Mary, the apostles and the disciples gathered in the Cenacle room were startled by the noise of a **strong wind** coming from the heavens and filling the room. The action of the Holy Spirit here is bold and empowers those huddled in fear of persecution to go out and preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth, even to die in witness to Jesus if necessary. This same Spirit will make us bold and cast out our fear with a more perfect love for Jesus that will impel us, too, to go out and proclaim the Gospel to all. **"Ruah" as the "breath" of God** symbolizes a more gentle action of the Spirit. Genesis says God formed Adam out of the dust of the earth and then breathed life into his nostrils. As Adam slept, God took a rib from Adam's side to form Eve and breathed life into her. In a vision the prophet Ezekiel saw a plain covered with dry bones which God brought to life by breathing His Spirit into them. Likewise, Jesus breathed His Spirit upon the dead body of Jairus' daughter and told her to rise. On Calvary Jesus, the new Adam, gave up his human spirit and poured out His Divine Spirit, giving birth to His Bride, Holy Mother Church, Whom He gave to us in the person of His Mother, the new Eve.

It is the Spirit Who breathes a share of God's divine life into us with the sanctifying grace of Baptism. Baptism powerfully portrays **the Spirit as "water," a water that cleanses us from sin and a water that fills us with new life**, the very life of God that changes us ontologically, in our very being, into a new creation so we no longer live on a merely natural level but on a supernatural one. In the story of Noah and the flood, water first symbolizes purification and then restoration of life. When Moses struck the rock, it brought forth life sustaining water for God's people journeying through the desert. Likewise, the water of the Red Sea was salvation for God's People, but it was death for the unbelieving Egyptians. Thus, Jesus as the new Moses, strikes the rock of His Church open like the wound in His side, to pour out His Spirit upon us as rivers of living water. The Book of Revelation speaks of God's **Spirit as a "river of living water"** flowing from the Eternal City of God's kingdom where the day never ends and there is only light, the kingdom already

within us through grace. From glory to glory we grow in union with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit.

Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: “Rivers of living water will flow from within him.” He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. (Jn 7: 37-39.)

The burning bush Moses saw on Mt. Sinai reveals the **Spirit as a flaming fire that consumes without destroying.** The pillar of fire was the sign of God’s presence with His people as it led them through the desert at night, illuminating their way. At other times, **God’s Presence was seen in the “cloud”** filled with dew that hovered over his people to rain blessing upon them as they traveled. This cloud alludes to the hidden and mysterious ways in which the Spirit so often works. At Pentecost the Spirit was manifest in the tongues of fire that penetrated the souls of those upon whom it rested and propelled them forth to witness to Christ and proclaim the Gospel. Water turned into wine at the wedding feast of Cana prefigures that most awesome power of the Spirit changing the bread and wine on our Eucharistic table into the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ to be spiritual food and drink for our souls, unto everlasting life.

The most familiar symbol of the Holy Spirit is the “dove.” In the account of Noah and the flood, the dove returns with an olive branch when the waters have receded, a sign the war of purification is over and peace and new life are restored. Two doves symbolize married love, or the love between Christ and His Bride, the Church. The spirit in the form of a dove resting on Christ’s shoulder gave testimony to His divinity when John baptized Jesus in the River Jordan. Clearly, the Spirit moves where and however it wills, sometimes in dramatic ways, rapidly and forcefully like the wind or rivers of water or like a consuming fire. Often the Spirit works like the dove, quietly, humbly, hidden in the nooks and crannies of our souls, resting there and stirring up our Faith with God’s Wisdom, fanning our little tongues of fire into pillars of flaming love for the Lord and for all who are His. Sometimes the Spirit just whispers God’s secrets and endearments to us softly in the quiet of our inner rooms, His sanctuaries, and bids us be still and know that He is God, be still and wait on Him, for He is full of miracles and surprises, all in His good time.

The dove appears also in the message of Our Lady of America®. Our Lord Himself called Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, the visionary, His “little white dove.” Those who knew Sister spoke of her humility and that awesome sense of peace in her presence. Her sister companion observed Sister Mildred in quiet rapture, a dove on her lap, angels all around her. She became a **Laudem Glorae, praise of God’s glory**, and in turn, became **His Vocem Laudis**, the voice of His praise as she proclaimed it to others. In Our Lady’s message Our Lady also speaks of her anxious concern about our interior lives and an urgently needed **“reform of life,” “sanctification from within” through union with the Indwelling Trinity.** Sanctification is perfected within us through suffering by the power of the Holy Spirit Who is the Master of the Interior Life and the Divine Indwelling. It is He who prays within us before the throne of the Father in the Word of Jesus. It is He Who, having filled Mary with such fullness of grace, fills us, too, in the measure in which we allow God to love us and to magnify Himself within, from glory to glory.

It is in living the mystery of the Indwelling Trinity that we will bring about the final triumph of Mary’s Immaculate Heart over Satan. This indwelling grace is a vital part of the glorious age of the Holy Spirit and of the Church. There are gifts of the Spirit given for our own personal growth in holiness and there are gifts, charisms, given for the growth in holiness of the Church, **but the power and the profundity of the gifts of the Spirit can**

never be limited. Each of us is not only **given a gift** that is uniquely ours to be a song of praise to the All Holy One, a praise no other can give, but each **IS a gift**, for life itself is the gift of all gifts born out of the bosom of the Father's Love. **Life is always sacred in God's sight**, and should be in ours, too.

It is the Spirit who clarifies Truth, exposes the demons, and illumines our way, while quietly transforming us into the image of the Beloved of God. Let us pray for a new Pentecost like we have never seen before to renew the face of the earth. May God's Spirit manifest the glorious Christ upon this earth in a way no science can ever deny and from which no heart can turn away. Let every heart see itself as God sees it, and may each of us fall prostrate in that knowledge, recognizing our sinfulness and our great need of the Redeemer to mercifully save us from ourselves and from those evil spirits, wolves in sheep's clothing, who seek to devour us. Our Lady calls us back to the interior life from which all action flows and away from the spiritual blindness resulting from the absence of God's Spirit. We lock ourselves out of our own souls if we have no inner room for prayer. We distance ourselves from the only Love that can truly satisfy us. We are the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision, crying out for God's Holy Spirit to breathe life back into us. On our knees let us pray...

O my Love, my only Good, Most Holy Trinity, I adore You, hidden in the depths of my soul. To You, to your honor and glory, I dedicate my life. May every thought, word and deed of mine be an act of adoration and praise directed towards Your Divine Majesty enthroned in my heart.

O Blessed Trinity, worthy of all adoration, I wish to remain in spirit on my knees, to acknowledge forever your reign in me and over me, to Your everlasting glory.
(from the Prayer to the Indwelling Most Holy Trinity.)

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