

**Feast of Pentecost - the birthday of the Church Let's Celebrate**  
May 23, 2021.

***“And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind... And there appeared to them tongues as of fire... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”*** (Acts 2:1-4).

Well, happy birthday to all! Traditionally Pentecost marks the beginning of the church. The disciples are filled with the Spirit and suddenly have the courage to do the preaching and healing that created the Body of Christ, known as the Church. The work and vision that brings us to church has begun.

But, of course, the power of the Spirit begins right from the beginning. In the Old Testament times, the Spirit was understood as the **“active but impersonal power of God.”** However, in the New Testament, the Spirit undergoes two developments. First, it is understood that **we receive the Holy Spirit at baptism and are thereby made adopted sons and daughters of God** (Catechism CCC 1265). On the day of Pentecost, St. Peter tells his fellow Jews to **“repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 2:38). Likewise, St Paul also says elsewhere that **baptism is the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit** (Titus 3:5; see 1 Peter 3:21, also CCC 1215). The second development of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is that **it is personalized and given ethical content**. This Sunday's Gospel reading from John (15:26-27, 16:12-15) gives an example of the personalized nature of the Spirit: **“Jesus's assurance that the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth will be sent to us and that the Spirit will be with us, and guide us into all truth.”** In the second reading (1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13), St Paul also assures us that, **“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.”**

Because we live in a tangible world, the idea that the power of the Holy Spirit is at work within us at all times is a difficult concept for many Christians. But just because we cannot see, touch, or measure the Spirit, it does not mean it has no power. There is a story about a beached tanker: When an all day effort to return the huge vessel to the water was unsuccessful, the captain told all crews and companies to stop and just wait. Finally when the tide came in at night the waters lifted the thousand-ton tanker off the beach and carried it, light as a feather, back to the deep. The work of the Holy Spirit is like the rising tide, imperceptible yet powerful. So the question for today is, **“How can we, who live in a world that is wary of the mysterious, better connect and trust in the unseen power of the Spirit?”**

The first thing is that **the Spirit acts in God's time and will, not necessarily ours**. There was a man who lost his spouse recently due to untimely death asked his friend who had lost his wife several years before how he had endured such pain and loss. His friend told him to visualize walking through a beautiful, thick forest of ancient redwoods when suddenly, there is a terrible sound, and one of the largest redwoods violently crashes to the ground. It is lying out of place, unnaturally on its side, roots exposed. An enormous hole in the forest floor is all that remains of its former life. Then he asked his friend to imagine returning to the site of the fallen tree years later. While the hole is still there, and always would be, the edges had softened. Where freshly exposed, barren dirt once was, ferns and beautiful wildflowers now grow. And the fallen tree is slowly becoming part of the landscape with numerous, multi-colour fungus, big and small on it. Over time, the scene had been transformed from a brutal, lifeless, unnatural one to one that, while still out of place since thriving redwoods should not fall in their prime, was at least now producing new life and beauty. **The Power of the Spirit is at work to transform**

**even the most painful of circumstances, but we must remember that God's time can sometimes take longer than we would wish.**

The second thing we can do to **better connect and trust in the Holy Spirit is to pray**, knowing the Spirit is at work as our intercessor. In Romans 8:26 we hear that "***The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.***" During the current COVID-19 pandemic times when many of us feel fearful, worried, depressed, it is important to remember to turn to prayer. Spend sometime everyday praying for God to make us more aware of the Holy Spirit. Ask him to work in us and make us more like Jesus. Ask him to take away our fear and give us boldness to fulfill our purpose through the power of God's Spirit. Yes, prayer is not designed so much to change God's mind or to tell God something he doesn't know already. He is the one who wants nothing other than to give us good things—though they might not always be what we want. I always consider praying is God's way to test our faithfulness and patience. Otherwise, Jesus won't say to his disciples and us "***Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. ....Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.***" (John 16:23)

And finally, **to remain open to the power of the Spirit we must remain in motion.** We must see it as God calling us into a deeper relationship with him and wanting us to share in his life. We must understand it as an invitation to enkindle the fire of love and to stir up the grace of our baptismal calling driving us into action. In the book of Acts we hear the Spirit referred to as a rush of a violent wind. Imagine you're sitting on the shore watching the sunset. There's a brisk wind, and a small sailboat is just off shore. But the boat doesn't have its sails up — just its bare mast. The winds become stronger and the currents push the vessel until finally it runs aground. Think how different the outcome would have been if the captain had simply lowered the anchor to secure the boat or raised the sails and worked with the wind. Instead of being beached on the shore, helpless, the small craft could have moved with the wind, working with that unseen power to overcome the forces of the earthly currents.

But what do these mean for you and me and all of us today? Partly it means to be aware, to see the Spirit working in our lives. And it means becoming comfortable with that Spirit working and acting in our midst, through our own words and deeds, when we allow it. St Paul defines ***the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control***" (Galatians 5:22). **The power of the Holy Spirit is working in each of our lives right now, but it requires us to be in motion in order to act.** Though the power of the Holy Spirit is an elusive concept for many Christians, we can be assured that the Spirit is with us. **The power of the Holy Spirit is with each and every one of us. This is the promise of Holy Scripture, and the Good News of today.**