

“Spirit”

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Whitsunday: Pentecost, Year C: May 27, 2007

*Genesis 11:1-9; Psalm 104:25-35, 37; Acts 2:1-21; John 14:8-17, 25-27*

Blessed be the name of God, Father Son, and Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit. Spirit. Spirituality.

We use these words a lot. On many occasions, they end up sounding like throw away words. I’m spiritual, but not religious. I was moved by the spirit. We have spirit, yes we do; we have spirit, how ‘bout you. But, today, is the day that the Spirit moves to center stage, the day we end the festival season of the resurrection of Christ; the day where the church immediately becomes a product of the resurrection through the working of the Spirit.

The Book of Genesis makes reference to the Spirit of God as moving over the face of the waters in Creation. Luke shows us the Spirit as a gift from God to the Church to empower us for ministry. John clearly places the Holy Spirit in Trinitarian form as a continuation of the teachings of Christ here on Earth. The Holy Spirit is revealed in the Old Testament as the giver of life, speaking through the prophets; and in the New Testament as leading us into all truth, enabling us to grow in the likeness of Christ. Still seems a bit ambiguous.

Today, in Genesis, we see the power of the Spirit working to scatter the peoples of the earth and give us different languages so we never become so comfortable with our role on Earth that we lose sight of God’s work in the world. We get a glimpse of the power of the Spirit in the second reading today, from the Acts of the Apostles. The followers of Jesus were gathered together and the sound of a violent wind heralded the coming of the Holy Spirit, giving them the ability to speak in other languages to preach the Good News to the whole world, regardless of geographic location, society, culture, or native tongue.

In Psalm 104, the Lord sends forth the Spirit to the earth and everything is created and has its being. [[ In the Collect for Purity, we ask that God use the Holy Spirit to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts. ]] The Collect of the Day that was prayed asked God to send the Holy Spirit to teach our hearts. In the baptismal covenant and Creed, we affirm our faith in the Holy Spirit, the Lord the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son...speaking through the prophets.

We hear in the Eucharistic Prayer that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, his own first gift for those who believe, to complete his work in the world and to bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all. It is the Holy Spirit who descends upon the bread and wine, sanctifying them to be holy food for God’s holy people. [[ And as we baptize two children of God today, we give thanks that by water and the Holy Spirit they have been forgiven of sins and raised to new life. The Spirit will sustain them and give them the gifts to know and love God. ]]

The Holy Spirit is alive in different realities in different faith systems. The Catholic Church, like us, emphasizes the Spirit’s work in the waters of Creation and the waters of baptism. The Eastern Orthodox Church sees the Holy Spirit as eternally proceeding from the Father, not the Father and the Son. The Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Unitarians believe the Holy Spirit is God’s Spirit, and not an actual person, as they don’t believe in the Trinity. The Islamic faith sees the Holy Spirit as another name for the archangel Gabriel. Hindus have a parallel with Kundalini, the divine intelligence behind spiritual awakening and

maturity through Yoga. And then, from Star Wars director George Lucas, comes the notion of The Force, able to guide and teach young Jedi Knights, as it is the life force that connects all things through time and space, similar to the Chee, from Eastern faith practices.

The Holy Spirit, indeed, is God, is of God, and is with God, throughout all ages and peoples. This Day of Pentecost is not a Christian invention, obviously, as the Jewish disciples were gathered on this day. In the ancient Jewish tradition it is a celebration to mark the end of the grain harvest. Early Christian writers connected this day with the Jewish tradition of the law given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, thereby birthing a new tradition.

In our history, Pentecost is also seen as the birthday of the Church, when the Spirit empowers us to spread the Gospel to all lands and peoples. Luke's account in the Book of Acts has some of the folks upon hearing the apostles speak in others' languages being amazed, others perplexed. Some praised God for this mighty witness, others thought they were drunk from wine. This empowering by the Spirit should really come as no surprise for those who believe, but nevertheless it surprises us and astounds us as we see the Kingdom of God being brought to life all around us. Indeed, this is an appropriate day for the baptism of new Christians as by water and the Spirit we die to sin and are reborn to a new and everlasting life in God.

Last Sunday, when 8 Christians were confirmed by the bishop we prayed..."that by to the sealing of the Holy Spirit you have bound us to your service." So with the new life of Baptism and the sealing of the Holy Spirit, our new life begins. The Church begins anew. This new life involves us leaving behind this brick and mortar and glass and steel that we call a church and going out into the world to become Church. The Spirit gives us strength and sustenance to help our neighbors, visit the sick, feed the hungry, and care for the poor.

This is how the Spirit has to do God's work in the world, as the Spirit has no arms and legs, but ours. The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ given as a first gift, has no heart, soul, or mind, but ours. Quoting writer Colin Gunton, "The Spirit is the one who empowers the worship and life of the whole church by bringing it as a community of faith to God the Father through the living presence of the Son. Consequent upon this is a theology of the church as open to responding to the Spirit's action wherever it is found."

The Holy Spirit, indeed, is a gift from God... healing us, binding us to one another, breaking down the barriers that separate us from each other. The Holy Spirit...guiding us, guarding us, and empowering us for service.

Amen.