

Pentecost Sunday, June 8, 2014
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Acts 2: 1-11; Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34; 1 Corinthians 12: 3b – 13; John 20:19-23

The Spirit moves in our lives in many ways. Today's feast gives us an opportunity to ponder ways that the Spirit gets deeply involved with each of us, Christ's followers. Why does the Spirit hold such an important place in our faith life? The Spirit is symbolized by wind, fire, descending doves, and flowing water, symbols which give life expressing the power of the third person of the Trinity. Years of experiencing different aspects of this power prompts me to share this reflection.

Creative power: The creative power of the Spirit is revealed at creation: "...the spirit of God was stirring above the waters." (Gen 1: 2) "Stirring" or "hovering" describes the act of creation which took billions of years as we now know from science. We also know that this creative act is still happening today and it moves us toward the future. It moves us to wonder at the great story of the emergence of innumerable species gracing our world and it inspires us to marvel at the beauty of the universe which reveals God's presence among us. We take part in this creative power when we innovate, think of "new ideas," imagine a world that is good and beautiful, when we live by love, peace, truth, and justice to create a world that exists for the common good. Paul writes, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation..." (2 Cor 5:17) The Spirit inspires works of art and music gifting the artist with creative power. Imagination is a powerful gift that prompts us to be visionary. The Spirit when poured upon all flesh prompts young people to see visions and old people to dream dreams. (Joel 2:17)

Power to proclaim the good news to the poor: Jesus acknowledged this power as foundational to his active ministry. The Spirit anointed him to minister to the poor. "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, has sent me to proclaim to the captives release, and sight to the blind; to set at liberty the oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of recompense.*" (Luke 4:18) This same Spirit descended upon the disciples during that feast of Pentecost and settled upon each of the 120 of them. Peter gets inspired to speak about Joel's prophecy before his listeners who were "cut to the heart." (Acts 2:37) The result was a vigorous movement; the Book of Acts records that 3,000 were baptized on that day. The Spirit changed their fear to courage. As a result, the community of believers grew in numbers.

Other Pentecost events are cited in the Acts 8, 10, and 19 and many more are etched in our memory. Recent examples come to mind: In my work with the Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) of the Union of Superiors General in Rome, I have sensed the power of the Spirit in the initiatives taken by the members of working groups of JPIC promoters who have committed time to find ways to address situations of injustice and conflict in many different parts of the world. These promoters from different congregations and different cultures, countries, and backgrounds collaborate to respond to situations that marginalize refugees and migrants; to prevent increasing cases of human trafficking, a form of modern-day slavery; to promote economic justice; to work towards collaboration between men and women in Church and society; to work for food security/sovereignty; and to work for peace. Because the issues are international in scope, approaches need to be strategic and structural. Where do they get the fortitude and wisdom to generate action and sustain these efforts? The only way I can explain their courage is by recognizing the power of the Spirit. They contribute their diverse gifts to the project at hand and inspire others to work for the Kingdom of God. Surely, the Spirit is an active Advocate in these endeavors!

Power within us, an inner abiding: In his book *Falling Upward*, Richard Rohr, OFM describes this kind of power of the Spirit that moves within us "secretly" and at the "deepest levels of our desiring." We sense this power within us, an inner abiding much like that which prompted Peter to a change of heart from denial to his profession of faith in the crucified Master. The disciples who were all scattered during the Passover also experienced a change of heart and were reunified after Jesus rose from the dead. Peter

became a staunch leader and the other disciples grew in courage and wisdom. The power of the Spirit is a call to self-transformation.

Jesus, having done all that the Father wanted him to do, was taken up into heaven sending his disciples to go and “teach all nations” about God’s love. Jesus fortified them by saying, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the very ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) During the 10 days after Jesus’ ascension, we imagine his followers waiting for the Paraclete whom Jesus promised. They gather together in a house in Jerusalem, choose Matthias to complete their number and strengthen their ranks. They plan how to proclaim the good news to the ends of the earth, but their plan was not enough. It needs a push, the timely mighty force, a most important value-added element that the Spirit provides. As well, Jesus’ disciples are comforted in their sadness due to the loss of their Lord and Master. Great was their joy when the Spirit finally came and anointed each of them. It was well worth the wait!

It is meaningful to reflect on these events to help us learn how to read the signs of the coming of the Spirit into our lives. The prerequisites sound simple: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father and he will give another Advocate to be with you *always*.” (John 14:15) Love, faith in Jesus, keeping his commandments, patience and tenacity in waiting, going beyond self, passion for the common good and unity of purpose. The Spirit is an abiding presence that quietly transforms our inner selves so we can love God and our neighbor as ourselves. We are to be inclusive of all those who belong to the very ends of the earth and to share the Spirit with them. Rohr emphasized that we have this confidence because “we are all drawing upon a Larger Source, the unified field, the shared Spirit.”

We take note of the other parts of the Pentecost scene: the act of being “sat upon” in Acts 2: togetherness (v.1); “suddenly” the winds signaled the coming of the Spirit (v.2), as tongues of fire anointing each with mighty force (passion) for the Kingdom (v.3); the promise of the Holy Spirit in God’s own time “which the Father has fixed by his own authority.” (Acts 1:7) It is also important to identify the patterns in our lives which show the fruits of the Holy Spirit: moments of sadness and weakness turned into joy and strong love; tragedies flowing into life-giving opportunities; disappointments becoming creative moments. All of these unexpected jolts - of feeling abandoned or rejected - entail going through a difficult phase of dying, yet *always*, the power of the Spirit pulls us up and moves us to go beyond self to be about the common good.

In times of discouragement, the Spirit is there to help us rise above the feeling of self-doubt, of being let down or put down. The dying could be excruciating, but the gift of rising above these death-dealing behaviors comes from the Spirit. Patience wins over discouragement; understanding, counsel, and wisdom overcome the immobilizing disappointment and hope surges anew. “*Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*” (Romans 5:5). Rohr reminds us that “the Spirit keeps us connected and safely inside an already existing flow, if we but allow it. We never ‘create’ or earn the Spirit; we discover this inner abiding as we learn to draw upon our deepest inner life.”

I appreciate persons who have made visible the Spirit’s gifts of wisdom, courage, fear of the Lord, understanding, counsel, knowledge, and piety (Isaiah 11:2-3). They exude a sense of joy, love, mindfulness, kindness, faithfulness and other fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22 -25). The Spirit always leads us to fuller life and we trust this promise from our own experience. Let us pray that we may see the power of the Spirit *always*. The work of the Holy Spirit is ongoing, engaging; it is like tapping into or being in a unified field, a field that holds all our Christian values from where we draw strength, power, and energy and where we find joy, peace, and love. Let us keenly search those points of connection with this undeniable force moving us with great power. I am convinced that the experiences that give hope are fruits of the intervention of the Spirit. Let us affirm them and be happily surprised whenever the Spirit settles upon each of us, anointing us with a great variety of gifts and companioning us *always*. Jesus said that we are never alone; to this we respond with deep gratitude and joy.