

***“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you”***  
(St. John 14.27)

When Jesus ascended to heaven, it was not the end. In fact, it was a beginning. For what was begun with his life, death, and resurrection, was soon to kick into high gear now that he had left. And what this was was the beginning of the spread of the Gospel.

But the disciples couldn't do it on their own, or at least they didn't think they could. They waited, and on the day of Pentecost – the beginning of the Jewish Feast of Weeks 50 days after the passover – the helper came. This helper, the Holy Spirit, was the one who was called to the aid of the disciples so that they could be empowered to fulfill Jesus' mission and “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28.19). This helper was the one promised by Jesus before he left them.

But, gathered in that room as they were, I have to imagine that the disciples were momentarily scared by what was happening: the rushing, howling wind – a fierce storm in the middle of an otherwise cloudless day. But despite this fear, they were filled with the reassurance of God's presence – a peace which passes all understanding. Their fear was turned into joy, their timidity turned into confidence. And so, empowered by the Holy Spirit, they were driven out into the streets to declare, loudly and in a multitude of languages, “the mighty works of God” to all those gathered in Jerusalem.

And what a scene it must have been. These men, suddenly appearing on the streets to preach following an unexpected, thundering rush of wind, and interpreting the Scriptures to the people in all their native languages. They must have seemed like prophets to some, and we know they seemed like crazy drunkards to others. But to those whose hearts were opened by God, they came to believe what the disciples told them, and the Gospel took hold in Jerusalem. Though the earthly life of Christ had ended, the earthly time of the Spirit had now begun – and with it came the Church – the Body of Christ.

It is both a fascinating story when you stop to pay attention to the details, and a compelling one when you stop to realize that, once again, this is an event that directly led to you and I being in this church together today.

Today, Pentecost, officially wraps up the Easter Season of the last 7 weeks, and we are now on the cusp of beginning that “other half” of the Christian Year. But in wrapping up the Easter Season, it is not doing so on a low note. Instead of being a low-energy dropping point, Pentecost is a high-energy kick-off point for the remainder of the year. Because now the Church's year focuses on growth: growth as individual members of the body, and growth of the whole body itself. For we are cast into this long Trinity season ahead with a reminder of the knowledge that we, as Christians, contain all the tools that we need for spiritual growth through the gift of the Holy Spirit. And as we are fed the stories of Christ's teachings among the disciples, we can continue to learn new things about our relationships with him and with each other.

However, before we leap into the growing season ahead, what does Jesus himself say about the Holy Spirit in our Gospel? What exactly is this new helper who has come to dwell in all Christians? We are, once again, located in John's lengthy retelling of the Last Supper. And Jesus is talking about the coming of the Spirit. He says that the coming of the Spirit is conditional upon loving him and keeping his commandments. If this is done, he will ask the Father who “will give the Spirit of Truth to dwell with you forever”. “You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you”. The Spirit is the part of God that dwells in us forever. Jesus, as we hear at Christmas especially, is Immanuel: God with Us. The Spirit, though, is God *in* us. This is an even more intimate connection where we are now united to our creator through himself.

We can notice this more intimate connection with the Spirit by one of the most repeated words in the Gospel of John. “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who *loves* me. And he who *loves* me will be *loved* by my Father, and I will *love* him and manifest myself to him” (John 14. 21). The word that I am pointing out is “love”. John, the evangelist who gave us the words “God so loved the World that

he gave his only-begotten son..." (3.16), and in his Epistles tells us that "God is Love" (1 John 4.16), is here telling us, through the words of Jesus, that the gift of the comforter is primarily a gift of love: an envoy of God's love.

This is certainly consistent with our understanding of the arc of Redemption through Holy Scripture. The fact that the coming of the Spirit is linked to God's love for his People makes sense when we remember all the great lengths that he continuously goes through to reunite his creation to himself. In this light, when Jesus calls the Spirit the comforter, I can think of it almost like the comforter of a bed: fluffy and encompassing, warm, and just what we need. It's almost something like a hug.

Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsay explains the Spirit as the best gift God can give us: *"If God so utterly loves us, He will want to give to each of us the greatest gift He could possibly give, and that gift is nothing less than Himself. The gift of the Holy Spirit; it means literally God in you: God on the soil of Palestine, the Lord Jesus; God the infinite creator, the Father; God literally in you in the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost and given through the ministrations of His Church all down the ages."* The Spirit is the gift of God himself given to his Church out of love.

We know this same spirit was at work throughout the Old Testament, too. He was present and active in creation (Genesis 1, Job 26:13, Isaiah 32:15), was breathing life into creatures and dry bones at the command of God (Genesis 2, Ezekiel 37), dwelling in various judges, warriors and prophets such as Joshua (Numbers 27:18), Gideon (Judges 6:34), Samson (Judges 13:25), and Saul (1 Sam 10:9-10). The Spirit entered and breathed through the prophets, just as when David declared that "the Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue" in 2 Samuel 23, and the prophet Ezekiel said "the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me" (2.2).

And now that the Spirit was sent to dwell in those who follow and love Jesus, the Spirit is among us all the time as believers. Our Lord says, "when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (St. John 16.7-13). Jesus tells us that the Spirit is responsible for teaching, reminding, convicting, guiding, and glorifying God. And St. Paul tells us many more of the gifts that come by the Spirit, including wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miracles, and prophecy (1 Cor 12:8-10).

We also encounter the Holy Spirit at work among us when we receive the Sacraments of the Church. We receive the gift of the Spirit in our Baptism to wash away our sins. At Confirmation, the Spirit descends upon us to strengthen our spiritual gifts. At the Eucharist, the Spirit acts to make the bread and wine we consume to be the Body and Blood of Christ. We live in the Spirit, we are enlivened by the Spirit, we are empowered by the Spirit. As members of the Body of Christ – the Church – the Spirit of Christ is among us and moves between us and creates that special bond that all Christians have – that we all belong to Christ and his Father. Through Jesus, we are all adopted as sons and daughters by God and are given his own Spirit to dwell in us forever. As Archbishop Ramsay says – this is the greatest of all possible gifts, for what gift could be better than God himself.

So, at this Pentecost, as we recall the first coming of the Spirit upon the Church, I challenge you to pay attention for how the Spirit works in you. I encourage you to try to notice how you are changed by the Holy Spirit, and how you might be being led by Him. How the acknowledgement of the presence of the Spirit brings you peace, and comforts you with the Love of God. For the Spirit does not simply move on one day, but for our whole lives until one day we are finally reunited with God in the new life. And it is the Spirit that empowers us to walk and love as Jesus first walked and loved us.

Come, Holy Spirit, Come and dwell with us this day and for our whole lives. May we be open to your leading, that we may be able to listen and discern God's will.

Amen.