

Title: The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, we give you thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit, infuse us with your love that we may share your love to the world, remind us always of your presence and give us strength for ministry, we pray to you, your son, and the Holy Spirit, through whom the church is always strengthened. Amen.

As I mentioned in my newsletter article, the Holy Spirit tends to have less attention given as one of the persons of the one God, particularly in churches like ours. Of course, we are not ignoring God, because whenever we talk about one part of the Trinity, we are talking about the whole of God. So, we can have a lesser emphasis on the Holy Spirit and still be faithful to the wholeness of God. In a sense, we cannot ever ignore the Holy Spirit. By acknowledging God, we acknowledge the Holy Spirit.

We will explore the mystery of the Holy Trinity next week. But today is the day of the Holy Spirit. It is the day that we celebrate as the birth of the church. It is our birthday. Without the Holy Spirit, there can be no church. The Holy Spirit is the engine that empowers all of us in doing Jesus' work in the world.

Many of you are older than I am and I am not young. As we age, we can no longer do all the things we could physically do when we were younger. It also doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit is done with us.

Alice Pirnie is an example. Alice likes to keep busy. She worked at the Broken Bow McDonald's for 26 years. She is a retired teacher. McDonald's is her second retirement job. Her first was at a nursing home her husband built. She is 90. There were over 100 people at her birthday party arranged by her daughters.

Alice works the lunch shift on Tuesdays and Thursdays. A grease fire made her take a few days off. Unless it is raining, she walks to work. During one rain storm, she drove to work. It was nice when her shift was over and she habitually walked home. When she called to say she left her car at work, they were surprised because they didn't think she could drive!

Alice says that life is better if you can be friendly. She ignores questions of when she will really retire. Alice says, “Every day I have is a gift from God. And I love to work. I’ll keep on working as long as the lord gives me good health, and I will just keep on until he tells me it’s time to quit.” (Gleaned from the Huffington Post)

I have a feeling that Alice would be unhappy if the Holy Spirit wasn’t keeping her going. That’s what the Holy Spirit does for us. That’s what the Holy Spirit did nearly 2,000 years ago to spur the disciples from the upper room to go out and risk telling others about Jesus.

The disciples were often together for mutual support. They were together for Pentecost, in Jerusalem. They were staying away from the observances. Then there was chaos, not a Maxwell Smart kind of chaos, but an utter hold on to your seat kind of chaos. The wind blew through the windows like a hurricane or tornado. These bright licks of light, looking something like fiery tongues, settled on each of them. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they began speaking in other languages. A wild scene.

That is why we use red for Pentecost. It represents fire and fire is one of the symbols of the Holy Spirit. As Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said in yesterday’s sermon at St. George’s Chapel, “And de Chardin said fire was one of the greatest discoveries in all of human history. And he then went on to say that if humanity ever harness(es) the energy of fire again, if humanity ever captures the energy of love, it will be the second time in history that we have discovered fire.”

I don’t know which Naked Gun movie it was, but there is a scene of a fire at a fireworks warehouse. The bad guys are somehow associated with the warehouse, which is why Detective Frank Drebin is there. A crowd naturally gathers as fireworks are launching and exploding all around the warehouse. Drebin displays his badge and shouts to the crowd, “Nothing to see here. Go back to your homes. There is nothing to see here.” The fireworks are still exploding behind him. Not the same as Pentecost, but it is similar.

The scene in Jerusalem was so wild and made such a commotion that it attracted a curious crowd. These people were from all sorts of places inside and outside the Roman Empire. Each person heard their own language being

spoken. You might imagine some the conversations: “How long you been coming here?” “Oh, about seven years.” “Yeah, about the same for me. Ever seen anything like this?” “Nope.” “Me neither. Suppose they’re drunk?” “Yeah, looks like it to me. These Galileans are too dumb to know other languages.”

Peter must have overheard their conversation. “They’re not drunk. It’s too early in the morning.” Which if you think about it isn’t a very good defense. Is Peter implying that they are usually drunk later in the day?

But now that Peter has their attention and being filled with the Holy Spirit, he is now emboldened to tell the story of Jesus. But first Peter preps the crowd. He does this by quoting the prophet Joel, specifically Joel 2:28-32. This puts what just happened in context. “In the last days ...,” is what Joel says. Jesus would have phrased it, “The kingdom has come near you.” This is what Peter means. The Jesus event is a sign that God’s kingdom has come. Jesus’ very existence proves this.

And now to add more proof, the Holy Spirit has come and what they heard was the result of the Spirit. The birthday of the church was foretold by God through Joel’s lips. Prophecy has returned to earth and knows no gender bias, no age bias. The Holy Spirit comes to everyone regardless of status. The great physical signs were already witnessed at Jesus’ crucifixion. *And* – everyone who calls on God will be saved. The audience knows that this will only happen when the messiah comes. The messianic age has begun.

Peter continues his sermon, reminding his audience about what Jesus did and links Jesus to King David, in other words the messiah. Even though David remains in his tomb, Jesus did not. Jesus is raised to God’s right hand. It all must have been effective. Thousands were baptized that day.

The Holy Spirit transforms frightened disciples into bold proclaimers of Jesus. The Holy Spirit chooses to arrive when Jerusalem is crowded. The potential audience is large. In essence, the gathering of a crowd was an evangelical model of people coming to hear a message. Now granted, a big commotion is what caused a crowd to gather, kind of like yesterday’s wedding.

But after that Pentecost, the disciples gradually left Jerusalem and the Holy Land. They were compelled to tell the story about Jesus and the world wasn't going to go to Jerusalem, a backwater province of the Roman Empire. They went to places where people gathered. They went to synagogues where Jews and those sympathetic to Judaism would gather and would understand their references to Jewish scriptures. They went to the marketplaces.

You know what? By today's standards we might say they were failures. They converted very few people in those first centuries. And in those odd places where they had a visible percentage of the population, they were persecuted. Who would join a group who lived under the threat of arrest and worse? But people did. The Jesus story was just too compelling. It could not be kept a secret.

Pentecost marks a strong contrast. We have the disciples huddled together in the upper room, afraid to go out to the populace. Then the Holy Spirit comes in dramatic fashion and they can't stay in the room any longer. They are compelled to go out and tell the story of Jesus.

Peter had the gift of public speaking and Peter had the gift of leadership before Pentecost. After he was infused with the Holy Spirit, those gifts were enhanced by the Holy Spirit.

We all have gifts. We all have abilities that we do better than an average person. These gifts from God are improved by the Holy Spirit. St. Paul talks about spiritual gifts in several of his letters. These Pauline gifts edify the church. But our gifts are not just for the church. They are a part of us in whatever we do. For Alice Pirnie it is encouragement and a smile for anyone who needs one.

No one can say, "I have no gifts." Everyone has gifts. But no one person has all the gifts. It takes a group or even a congregation working together to do the work they are to do, even the work of God. Peter did not continue the church all by himself. Paul did not further the work of any of the churches he founded. Paul allowed the people, gathered together, to do the work of God in their communities. They were successful when they shared their gifts.

We gather into congregations on Sunday to be spiritually filled and strengthened. To do God's work, utilizing our gifts, can drain us. We need recharging. We need encouragement. We gather so that we may re-enter the world filled with the Holy Spirit to do God's work in the world.

Text: **Acts 2:1–21** (NRSV)

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.

¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ 'In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' ¹

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (Ac 2:1–21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.#