

Fr. John's Homily for May 28, 2023 - Pentecost Sunday

JMJ CHS

A few weeks ago I said something about the Holy Spirit being the most difficult of the three persons of the Blessed Trinity to relate to. Well, apparently I am in good company in saying that because this past week in the Office of Readings, leading up to today, several Church Fathers from way back when said basically the same things that I've been saying. But just more eloquently than I ever could.

And so again, we necessarily return to the subject of the Holy Spirit on this day that is commonly referred to as the *Birthday of the Church*. And we have our parish icon up here, which captures the moment with Mary at the center of the disciples when the Holy Spirit was manifested as tongues of flame above their heads.

But, the *Birthday of the Church*? I don't know if that is an official doctrine. I did not check the Catechism. But I can say that there was a famous Catholic priest, Fr. John Hardon - and he was no slouch - who offered a slightly different perspective. He maintained that the Church was literally born when the blood and water that came from Jesus's wounded side flowed down upon the ground after His sacred heart was pierced by the centurion's lance.

Was it kind of a baptism of the earth? Possibly. But, I can see Father Hardon's point. Maybe we could say that the Good Friday moment was something like the Conception of the Church, whereas after a 50 day gestation period, on Pentecost Sunday, we actually celebrated a birthday; the day that the Church was publicly proclaimed for the very first time and began to grow immediately, under the power of the Holy Spirit.

One of the ways that we could learn more about the mysterious Holy Spirit would be to take the time to reflect on the prayers that we pray to Him, (I'll refer to the Spirit as a 'Him' today) or even the songs that we sing to Him, paying close attention to the words. I've already shared a few newer prayers with you like "Come, Holy Spirit, come by means of the powerful intercession of Mary. Your beloved spouse,"

And we have the one that we say at the end of our weekend Masses: "*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love.*" (BTW, you should have this memorized by now). But those songs, they're right there in your *Journey Song* hymnal, you could open one up at any time, go to the Pentecost Section, and just read the songs as a prayer, or more accurately, as a poem. I would say that the most famous Holy Spirit song is "*Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest, and in our hearts take up Thy rest..... Oh Comforter to thee we cry. Thou Heavenly gift from God on high. Thou Font of life, and Fire of love, sweet anointing from above.*"

We have the dove here in our baptistery, which appeared only one time in the Gospels. There, at the baptism of Jesus. It is probably the most recognizable symbol of the Holy Spirit. And we have another dove image on the wall in the activity center with the words of a song that is typically sung in Latin. *Veni Creator, Spiritus*. Come Creator Spirit. Lord of grace. Making us

your dwelling place. Ah, there's a hint. Dwelling place? Yes, we are temples of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is..... within us. A product of our Baptism and Confirmation.

I told you that I have never experienced the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the ways people typically think of – I'm talking about speaking in tongues, or prophesying - which is also known as a Word of Knowledge - and I have never been "Slain in the Spirit". - Oh, there was that one time when someone "laid hands" on me and I ended up on the floor. I felt I was pushed! I didn't lose consciousness, so I got right up. It's not that I don't believe in any of these things, I've actually seen them at charismatic prayer meetings or Masses. I've even seen them right here in our sanctuary with visiting priests. And I actually prayed over somebody recently and they ended up on the floor. First time that ever happened to me... as a priest. And I'm sure it was genuine. It's just not that common around here, for you, or for me.

But as I've said before, the Holy Spirit manifests itself in many many different ways and some of the Church Fathers were capable of conveying to all of us a better understanding of that Third Person. Let me give you an example from one of those Fathers, St. Cyril of Jerusalem. Again, this came from this past Tuesday's *Office of Readings*: "*The Spirit makes one man a teacher, inspires another to prophesy, and gives another the power of casting out devils, enables another to interpret scripture. The spirit strengthens a man's self-control, shows another how to help the poor, teaches another how to fast and to lead a life of denial, makes another oblivious to the needs of the body, trains another for martyrdom. His action is different in different people but the Spirit himself is always the same.*"

These words should serve as a consolation to most of us. We may have the Holy Spirit flowing through us in a way that, well, we didn't even recognize because its work can be quite subtle, and it's who we are by nature. An example would be one of those gifted individuals who helps the poor. Our *St. Vincent de Paul* members must be filled with that particular gift because, frankly, it's the most difficult ministry of our parish. They need that special gift of the Holy Spirit to have the will to serve, but then the strength and the courage, to be able to do that kind of work.

This past week our Bishop Earl weighed in on the Holy Spirit. He sends out a weekly communication and maybe some of you get it by way of your email. He reminded us that we have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation. And I think yet more can come to us ... at our own request. Remember the statement from last week? "*If a son asks his father for a loaf of bread, will the father hand him a scorpion? If an earthly father knows how to give good gifts to his children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask it of him*". So, for instance, if you indeed do have a heart to serve the poor, but maybe you don't feel you are up to the task, ask the Holy Spirit for the courage and the strength to pursue it.

Yes, everybody likes to receive gifts, and it would seem to me that the gifts of the Holy Spirit would be the greatest of all. There are seven of them and I'm particularly fond of the first one that's listed. Here they are: *Wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.*

But St. James in his letter tells us that, “*The Wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.*” Needless to say, he’s not talking about the wisdom of the world. That’s not wisdom at all. It might be cleverness of shrewdness or intelligence, or a lot of common sense, but the kind of wisdom we’re talking about is different. Maybe the best way to put it is that the beginning ... just “the beginning of wisdom ... is the fear of the Lord.”

As we continue to advance into this very mysterious and uncertain future of both Church and world, it would seem to me that we need, above all else, more wisdom in order that we might be peaceable beacons of light in a world that is descending into darkness, and losing its peace.

And so that would be my prayer for myself, as a shepherd, and my prayer for you, the members of this church named after the Third Person. Come, Holy Spirit, grant us the gift of wisdom.

~Fr. John