

Pentecost – 2023

Think with me, for a moment, about breathing. We are all doing it, and we do it all the time – awake or asleep, without very often thinking much about it. In the face of all the differences that can separate and divide the human family, we all breathe the same way, in the same atmosphere. And even with all our sophisticated medical technology and imaging, we still spontaneously associate breath with life – we can it *respiration* – and all of this is an important opening to the meaning of Pentecost.

God too has been sending forth the Spirit of Life from all eternity ... not physical breathing, of course, as we need to do, but the *constant, dynamic exchange of love between Father and Son, love so profound and perfect that the Spirit IS the Third Person of the Triune God*. As we inhale and exhale, we get some vague insight into the Father and the Son continually giving and receiving that Love that IS the Spirit. As the Psalm reminds us, God does not breathe as we do, to stay alive, but to GIVE being and life to all things: *“Send forth your Spirit and they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.”*

Pentecost revisits the scene of Jesus’ farewell at the Last Supper with the gift of peace, words we recall at every Mass: “Peace I leave you, my peace I give you.” That is also the first word of the Risen Christ to those same Apostles, gathered in fear on Easter night: “Peace be with you.” Twice he repeats these words ... perhaps the first time to calm their fears and assure them of His forgiveness, and then the second time, giving them the content of their mission and its message ... that same Peace that they had come to know in the Risen Jesus. Indeed, John puts it just that way: “Peace be with you ... as the Father has sent Me, so I send you. Then He breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit.” *Peace is Christ’s gift to the world* ... the gift of God’s own unity and harmony, made one in the Spirit, because the Bond of Love between Father and Son is the bond of union in the Church as well, *the Spirit we invoke upon the bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Jesus in the Eucharist, which makes us one Body in Christ*.

Jesus **breathed** on them, John says. This is the very breath of God ... the same breath that hovered over the waters at creation, the same breath that the Creator had first given to Adam, as Genesis tells it; the same breath that gave voice to Christ's words in His teaching; and the same breath that was spent to the end on the Cross, bringing reconciliation with God. On that Easter night, the Spirit was given, gently, in a breath, to the Eleven; on Pentecost, the Spirit is revealed to the world, a strong mighty wind but still the same breath of God, visible also as tongues of fire to ignite faith, hope, and love in the world. Sometimes in our lives, too, the Spirit will come gently and subtly; sometimes in a remarkable way. In either case, it is the same Spirit, breathing God's own life upon us, living Temples of God's abiding presence.

When we face difficult decisions; when there are chores to do or conversations we would rather not have; when we come upon temptations in our lives ... *in such moments it is good for us to stop and take a deep breath, not just to give ourselves time to think, but to give time for God to speak, for the Spirit to breathe in our lives as well.* From the Cross on Good Friday, the *dying* Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I commend My Spirit." From the day of Pentecost, and down the centuries into our lives, the *Risen* Christ says to us: "Into your hands I commend My Spirit" – the Gifts of God empowering us to announce the Gospel by word and even more, by example, so all may understand. *We breathe; and as we breathe, we can recall that moment of our own Confirmation, as John did, when the risen Christ breathed on him, and gave the gift of peace with those words: "Receive the Holy Spirit."*