

Pentecost – 2024

As you settle in, take a deep breath, and let it out slowly. Breathing is something we all do, and we do it all the time – awake or asleep, without thinking much about it. Many things enter our lives that can separate and divide the human family. But we all breathe the same way, and we all share the same atmosphere God has created. Even with all our sophisticated medicine and scientific knowledge, we still spontaneously associate breath with life. That simple act of breathing can help us understand Pentecost.

God has been sending forth the Spirit of Life from all eternity ... the *constant, dynamic exchange of love between Father and Son, so profound and personal a Love that the Spirit IS the Third Person of the Triune God*. As we inhale and exhale, we get some 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 need to 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.”*

You will remember the scene of Jesus’ farewell at the Last Supper, words we recall at every Mass: “Peace I leave you, my peace I give you.” And peace is also the first word of the Risen Christ to those same Apostles, gathered in fear on Easter night. Twice he repeats it: “Peace be with you” – perhaps the first time to calm their fears and assure them of His forgiveness for having fled in fear; and then the second time, giving them their mission: the same Peace that they had come to know in the Risen Jesus was to be their message to the world. John remembers this sending vividly: As the Father sent me, so I send you. Then He **breathed** on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit.” The Breath that is divine love, the Bond of Love between Father and Son is the bond of union in the Church as well. We continue to call down the Spirit at every Mass *upon the bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Christ. In the Eucharist, the Spirit of Love is present to make us one with God and one another. Peace and unity, oneness in God’s love: that is the enduring and unfailing Gift of the Spirit.*

When Jesus **breathed** on them, it is of course the very breath of God, a gift both human and divine. This is 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 Body of Christ. 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, making 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 into that moment 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 to today, the *Risen* Christ says to us: "Into your hands I commend My Spirit" – the Gifts of God are given so we can announce the Gospel by word and even more, by example, so all may understand the universal language of Love. *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."*