

**May 31, 2020 | Pentecost (A)**

[ACTS 2:1-11](#)

[PS 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34](#)

[1 COR 12:3B-7, 12-13](#)

[JN 20:19-23](#)

By Dawn M. Nothwehr, OSF, PhD.

This Sunday we celebrate Pentecost, the “50th day” following Easter. Originally it was a low standing Jewish celebration of 50 days after Passover. It commemorated the day when, after being freed from slavery in Egypt and after wandering through the desert, Israel finally came to Mount Sinai. That was where God appeared to Moses in a very powerful way, instructing him on the law that was given to Israel. They then enter into a covenant with God: "I will be your God. You will be my people." Israel remained God’s chosen people over 1,200 years before the time of Jesus.

In Acts chapter 2, we hear that the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles as Jesus had promised and filled them with the capacity to speak different languages and emboldened them to preach about Christ. This was indeed a marvelous and dramatic moment in the founding of the early Church. But if we think of this as merely the founding of an institution, we are only partly right, because we fail to comprehend the thorough-going depth of the Spirit’s reach throughout the Earth and all its elements and creatures, as well as the Spirit’s action in our personal lives.

It is significant for us today that the Greek word for Spirit is *pneuma*.“ *Pneuma*; to breathe, blow, primarily denotes the wind. Breath: the spirit which, like the wind, is invisible, immaterial, and powerful” and necessary for life. As the late Australian theologian Denis Edwards so beautifully demonstrates in his [\*Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit\*](#) (2004, Orbis), “a holistic theology of the Spirit begins, not with Pentecost, but with the origin of the universe some 14 billion years ago.... a story of the Creator Spirit begins with the first second of the observable universe” (p.1). The Holy Spirit gives life in all its forms and dimensions – physical, spiritual, social, psychological – enabling us (humans) with a wide variety of personal gifts (1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13), but also gifting our planet with the mind-boggling diversity of the material and biological worlds. Yet, we must ask - What have we done with this gift? Have we been as generous in caring for the gift as “the Giver of Life” has been in the giving?

In recent weeks, we have marked the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Earth Day and the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the promulgation of Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si – On Care for Our Common Home*. During this time, Christians and numerous others have been staying “behind closed doors” (Jn 20:19-23) – not “for fear of the Jews,” but for the fear of being exposed or exposing others to COVID-19. In their own context in the natural world of other-than-human-beings, viruses play important ecological roles. But with the immense human encroachment into their habitats, which also kills off the natural plant and animal barriers between these creatures and us – [viruses have jumped into the human world](#), and caused the pandemic that is now painfully familiar to all people! As Christians we need to examine what we have done and what we have failed to do. Then we must open ourselves to

the Holy Spirit's empowerment so we can act immediately with urgency to learn from this tragedy – and change our ways!

We need to more consciously invite the Holy Spirit to play a role in our lives. We need to recall the commitment we made at our Confirmation to live in light of the Gospel, upon receiving the Gifts of the Holy Spirit - wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude (or courage), knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. As the Pentecost Sequence so beautifully announces – The Holy Spirit is not only a Creator, but also a Healer, Comforter, Consoler, and Giver; one who enlightens, refreshes, cleanses, warms, and much more. In these days having celebrated the [5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary](#) of Pope Francis 'Laudato Si' - *On the Care For Our Common Home* let us open ourselves to the renewing and empowering Holy Spirit, so that when the COVID-19 pandemic is history, we may find ourselves stronger and more faithful to the Gospel, displaying the twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, long suffering, mildness, faith, modesty, continence, and chastity.

Holy Spirit, by your light  
you guide this world towards the Father's love  
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.  
You also dwell in our hearts  
and you inspire us to do what is good.  
Praise be to you! - *Laudato Si* § 246

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