



## Pentecost Sunday A May 31, 2020

- ◆ **Welcome Back after an Unexpected Exile!**
- ◆ **Reflection on the Feast of Pentecost and the Birthday of the Church**

This weekend, parishes across our nine-county diocese and other dioceses in Florida are welcoming back parishioners to Sunday Mass. Our last weekend Mass was the Third Sunday of Lent on March 15, 2020. So we have not had a Sunday Mass with you present for ten weeks.

We might say we have been in a sort of exile or a long vacation from our spiritual center. This has been and continues to be a ‘strange time’ in our lives—the strangest time that most, if not all of us, have ever experienced. But thanks to social media, we have been able to stay in touch with all our parishioners who have a computer, smart phone or tablet. (We mailed the bulletin to some 30 parishioners who are without internet access.)

As we go forward, there are many challenges ahead:

- ◆ Doing what we need to do inside and outside the church to protect ourselves and others from the virus.
- ◆ Living with the restrictions of social distancing in the workplace, parish life and social life.
- ◆ Discerning what the Lord is saying to us during this time.
- ◆ Realizing that people respond to Covid-19 in different ways. Some think “it’s all nonsense.” Amazing! Others want to force everyone to act in a particular way, e.g., mandatory wearing of masks. Still others think the Church is being overly cautious.

I, for one, believe that ‘erring on the side of caution’ is the right thing to do. In saying that, I’m not opposed to businesses opening up. At a time when 30 million people have lost their jobs and thousands have lost their business, I think it is judicious to reopen our economy but not without utmost caution and safety in mind. ‘The question is *not* “to open or not to open.” Rather, it is *how* we open up, and that is, of course, responsibly. We still

need to be prayerful and responsible, especially in church, where we still have some control over how things should be done.

### **The Holy Spirit: the Kiss of God**

The following is a beautiful reflection on the Feast of Pentecost which appeared in Priest Magazine in April 1988. I do not know the name of the priest who wrote it.

*Kissing another person is one of the ways in which we indicate that we love that person. Husbands kiss their wives and wives kiss their husbands. Boyfriends kiss their girlfriends, and girlfriends kiss their boyfriends. Parents kiss their children, children kiss their parents. From the day of our birth we are taught that one appropriate way to express our love for another person is to kiss that person.*

*There are a variety of forms of kissing. There is mouth to mouth, cheek to cheek, or hug to hug. It is only natural that husbands and wives kiss each other or for parents to kiss their children as they tuck them into bed at night. When friends, who have not seen each other for a long time, meet, they usually hug each other.*

*Some people do more kissing than others. Some people are always kissing other people. There are reserved kissers, those who save it for special occasions.*

*Why do we engage in so much kissing? This is probably a question we never ask ourselves. We just do it. It is only natural to kiss the people we love.*

*There is more to it than that, however.*

*Kissing is an exchange of love. Kissing is also an exchange of breath. It represents the co-mingling or exchange of breath—not mouth-to-mouth resuscitation—but a real sharing of the breath of the other person.*

*We have to get close to the person in order to kiss that person. In getting close, we breathe on that person and the other person breathes on us. Breath is exchanged.*

*In ancient times, the soul or spirit or life-principle of each person was identifiable with breath. When the breath went out of a person, the soul or spirit or life-principle left that person, and he or she was dead.*

*This is why in the Book of Genesis, God is portrayed as breathing the breath of life into Adam’s nostrils.*

*When God breathes on Adam, he comes alive; he becomes a living being. In other words, God kissed him. It was God who started all this kissing.*

*Kissing represents a spiritual union. Just as a person who kisses another share his or her breath with the other person, so God kisses us and shares His breath with us. God shares His Spirit with us.*

*Our response to God is to either receive the spirit and breathe it in deeply, thus kissing God, or reject it and back away from it. God's kiss is a sign of the deepest communion of shared life at the deepest level that can be attained between one person and God.*

*The Gospel is about kissing. Jesus appeared to His disciples and He kissed them. This new presence of Jesus sealed with a kiss, we call the Spirit.*

*Through each of the disciples, Jesus kisses them with His breath. He breathes on them, infusing them with the same spirit that He breathes on them, infusing them with the same spirit that He had so recently breathed through His own broken body and summoned it to new and eternal life.*

*The Father kissed Jesus on the cross and breathed new life into Him—just as He had done in ages past, when He blew the breath of life into the nostrils of the first Adam. This new life with which the Father kissed Jesus is the Spirit.*

*Now Jesus breathes on His disciples and kisses them with new life. The resurrection continues as Jesus' larger body, the Church, is quickened by the same life-giving Spirit.*

*We celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost. We celebrate the gift of kissing, of breath, of Spirit. The Father kissed Jesus, who in turn kissed His disciples. The disciples kissed one another.*

*God continues to kiss us through each other. God breathes on us through each other, sharing His Spirit with us, kissing us. When we bring together those who are separated by physical and psychological pain, unkind words, deep hurts, we find God kissing us. To be separated is to be cut off and not to be kissed. To be brought back, breathed on, welcomed and kissed is to be infused with new life, with the Spirit.*

*Forgiveness is another way God kisses us. Through the community, God offers us forgiveness for our sins. Sin is being less than we are called to be, renegeing on our own human dignity. When we cheat, lie, steal, smoke excessively, drink too much and gossip, we sin. But when we let God forgive us, when we let others forgive us, and when we forgive ourselves, we experience Pentecost. God comes and gives us a big kiss of forgiveness.*

*At the Eucharist God kisses us. We offer each other a sign of peace. This action of offering peace used to be called the kiss of peace. Offering peace to each other is*

*offering a kiss to each other. Our kiss of peace is not a "How are you?" or a chance to say "Good morning" or "Good evening." It is an outward sign of our love for each other.*

*This kind of love identifies us as the new body of Christ. Our sign of peace is another way that God kisses us and fills us with His Spirit. It is Pentecost.*

*The Pentecost kiss must be authentic. We must mean what we do. This is not something to do just as an act of friendliness. Otherwise, it is just another empty ritual. Remember Judas? He betrayed Jesus with a kiss.*

*Our sign of peace must be a real sign of peace. If it is, then we share breath, we share spirit with each other. Pentecost happens again. Pentecost is nothing other than God kissing us with the greatest kiss of all time—the Gift of His Spirit.*

### **The Church, Our Spirit-Filled, Extended Spiritual Family**

Today we celebrate the birthday of our Church. Catholics believe and teach that the Holy Trinity brought the Church into being. *The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* states:

*The Father called the Church into existence.*

*The Son established the Church.*

*The Holy Spirit filled the Church with power and wisdom at Pentecost.*

*The Holy Trinity abides with the Church always, creatively and providentially.*

*The Church empowered by the Holy Spirit, brings Christ's salvation to the world. She is the instrument of God's call to holiness.*

*At the same time, the Church is made up of sinful people, yet despite the personal sinfulness of her members, the Church remains holy by the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit who permeates her.*

The Church flows from the life of the Trinity. We can say that from all eternity, the Church has been the plan of God. From the beginning, God wanted to *share* his divine life with us, his children.

God prepared for the founding of the Church by forming the people of Israel. The Church is sometimes called the New Israel.

Jesus—the Word of God made Flesh—brought to fulfillment the Father's plan for a church. He started this process by preaching the Good News of salvation and the invitation to participate in God's divine life: "*I am the Vine, you are the branches*" (John 15:1-8). Then he called together some of his disciples who in turn would

become the pillars of the young Church. We call these men, the Apostles. *“The Holy Spirit revealed the Church at Pentecost, coming upon the Apostles and the disciples with a transforming fire and forming them into a visible community, and empowering them to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ”* (U.S. Catechism, p.114).

We know from the Acts of the Apostles that there is an inseparable link between the Church and Jesus and the Holy Spirit. When Saul was persecuting the Church, Jesus appeared to him and said: *“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”* Saul answered: *“Who are you, sir?”* The voice answered: *“I am Jesus and you are persecuting me”* (Acts 9:4-5).

When we are tempted to lose faith in our Church because of its flawed members, we must remember that the Church is the Body of Christ in our midst.

### ***Church of Sinners***

Catholics believe that the Church is both *human* and *divine*. As human, its earthly members are not exempt from sin and will always be in need of purification and interior renewal. In the Catholic Church, this need for ongoing conversion is evident by the presence of confessionals in her churches. We are indeed a “Church of sinners.” In fact, if we were to place a sign over the Church door as a condition of entry, it would read: “Only Sinners May Enter.”

Remember what Jesus said: *“I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners”* (Luke 2:17). The Church’s membership has *always* been imperfect (recall the betrayal of Judas and the denials of Peter), *is* still imperfect, and will undoubtedly remain imperfect until the end of time.

Learning to live with and work in a Church with imperfect members can be a faith challenge for many people. Unfortunately, lots of Catholics cannot accept this reality and, for this reason, opt out. Some go church-hopping in hopes of finding the *perfect* church, which is just not attainable.

### ***Divine Nature of the Church***

I’m not sure but I think that only the Catholic Church believes in its *divine* nature and origin. Our Church was not created by some earthly human being. Our Church was founded by Jesus who promised to be with her until the end of time. Catholics also believe that the Holy Spirit permeates the Church, guiding her and

empowering her to continue the work of Jesus here on earth. So while the Church is *always* in need of *reform* and renewal, she is *never* in need of *replacement*—the mistake Martin Luther and other Reformers made in the 16th century. What Jesus founded and promised to remain with until the end of time is *never* in need of replacement.

## **Three Prayers to the Holy Spirit**

### **Breath of God**

[The Holy Spirit is often referred to as the Breath of God.]

Breathe on me, breath of God,  
fill me with life anew,  
that I may love the things you love,  
and do what you would do.  
Breathe on me, breath of God,  
until my heart is pure,  
until with you I have one will,  
to live and to endure.

Breathe on me, breath of God,  
my soul with grace refine,  
until this earthly part of me  
glows with your fire divine.  
Breathe on me, breath of God,  
so I shall never die,  
but live with you the perfect life  
in your eternity.

Midmorning Prayer from Liturgy of the Hours

### **Prayer 2**

***Holy Spirit, let your gracious love  
and presence descend upon us,  
so that no unchaste thought  
may corrupt the souls  
which you have ordained for your praise,  
no unchaste actions defile the bodies  
which are temples of you.***

***Grant that—our hearts  
being filled with love of you—  
we may be enabled to overcome  
the temptations of this present life,  
and finally be made partakers  
of the glories of the world to come,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.***

***Amen.***

### **Prayer 3**

*Breathe in me, O Holy spirit,  
that my thoughts may all be holy.*

*Act in me, O Holy Spirit,  
that my work, too, may be holy.*

*Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,  
that I love but what is holy*

*Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,  
to defend all that is holy.*

*Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,  
that I always may be holy.*

*Amen.*

### **Story of the Blind Fish**

“Excuse me,” said one ocean fish to another, “you are older and more experienced than I, and will probably be able to help me. Tell me, where can I find this thing they call the Ocean? I’ve been searching for it everywhere but to no avail.” “The Ocean? But this is the Ocean,” said the older fish. “Oh, this? But this is only water. What I’m searching for is the Ocean,” said the young fish, feeling quite disappointed as he swam to search elsewhere.

So often in our search for God, we forget that he is all around us. In him, we live and move and have our being.

Have a blessed week,

*Le Saran*