

Happy Pentecost Sunday! A day when we remember how the early Christians were gathered in one place, as we are today, and experienced the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Let's take a deep dive into the waters of the Holy Spirit and discover where it fits into our spiritual journey.

This is a quote from Fr. Hugh Barbour, a Norbertine Priest who contributes to Catholic Answers. "Our spiritual life from beginning to end, and indeed into the life to come, is THE WORK OF GOD. He moves us in every way that bears on our salvation and sanctification; his grace precedes, accompanies, and perfects all of it." It's as if we float along in the waters of the Holy Spirit. We are God's creation and therefore A work of God. But that is only the beginning. Unlike a statue or a painting, we evolve and grow. And with the help of the Holy Spirit we become a work of art, the masterpiece that God intended us to be.

In our gospel reading Jesus says after the Last Supper, "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him." This is a promise to fill our hearts with God the Father and his Son. Later in this gospel Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit saying, "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you."

This idea of an advocate is very powerful. When we were kids, we all had our thing. One of my brothers played football, another played the electric organ, and I was a swimmer. Each of us had a coach or a teacher acting as an "advocate," similar to the Holy Spirit. First, they gave us the knowledge needed to excel at our sports or music, and second, they motivated us to overcome our "spiritual" limitations. When our spirits would sink after losing a game or failing to progress after much practice, our advocates would motivate us and encourage us to stay positive in the face of adversity. A good advocate focuses not just on acquiring knowledge, but more importantly, who we are becoming, and encourages us to persevere in faith. The Holy Spirit is our advocate in all things and our source of grace that, "Precedes, accompanies, and perfects all."

I recently met with a small group of new Catholics to discuss the topic of "holiness," one of the main objectives of the Holy Spirit. I asked them to talk about people in their lives they considered holy. One woman in the group mentioned a longtime friend who was a very joyful person, who went to mass every day, and always went out of her way to help others. She was an inspiration and a treasured friend. Let's think of our own family and friends. Who in our lives can we draw inspiration from as a holy person?

Pentecost gives us access to the Holy Spirit, but how do we know if we are being guided by the divine? Galatians chapter 5 is a good place to start, as it calls out the fruits of the Holy Spirit. They begin with love, joy, and peace. Love is first, because the Holy Spirit is the Love between the Father and the Son.

Bishop Barron says, "Love is breaking out of the gravitational pull of the ego and living for the other." We know we are guided by the Holy Spirit when we move from seeing others as an obstacle in our lives, to looking at them as an opportunity to love. An example of love is when we stop our busy day and respond in love to an unexpected call, text, or email.

Other fruits of the Holy Spirit are joy and peace. A joyful life is guided by the Holy Spirit and is characterized by peace or well being. Bishop Barron calls this, "The connection at the very depth of your soul to the Spirit of God, that gives us a peace, a harmony, and a serenity which can endure any of the changes in life." Whether we are in healthy or sick, successful or struggling, joy and peace come from knowing we are floating on the waters of the Holy Spirit.

Going back to my discussion with the new Catholics, we discussed the barriers to holiness or things that block us from the Holy Spirit. Everyone in the room, including myself, confessed to having difficulty finding time to pray. One of our younger members said, "I know I don't have time to pray, but I seem to have time to spend on my phone." Just like our phone, the Holy Spirit is always on standby, ready to engage in our lives and steer us back to the work of God.

Speaking of phones, she also said the Halo App was very helpful during her first Lenten journey and she used it to challenge herself to pray more. The App starts you out with 5 minutes of silent prayer a day, and over time works you up to 20 minutes. She found 5 minutes nearly impossible at the beginning, but eventually she was able to expand to more and more time. She said silent prayer gave her a deep sense of peace that she hadn't experienced in long time. This peace is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit we are looking for.

I'd like to end with a prayer in memory of the first Pentecost. It's called, "Prayer to the Holy Spirit." I thought we could all say it together as a community. (Ask Shela to display words.)

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created,
and you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who have taught the hearts of the faithful
by the light of the Holy Spirit,
grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise
and ever rejoice in his consolation.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

John 14:15-16, 23b-26

Jesus said to his disciples:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And I will ask the Father,

and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always.

Whoever loves me will keep my word,

and my Father will love him,

and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.

Those who do not love me do not keep my words;

yet the word you hear is not mine

but that of the Father who sent me.

I have told you this while I am with you.

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name,

will teach you everything

and remind you of all that I told you."