

# Sunday Message

**THE WORD**

Year B • Psalter Week 4

## THE EMPOWERING SPIRIT

(JOHN 20:19-23)



"Dove of the Holy Spirit" at Throna of St Peter by Bernini (1600s) in St Peter's Basilica, Rome

The miraculous appearance of Jesus among the disciples in a locked room shows that he is no longer constrained by physical limitations.

Although the disciples have been told by Mary Magdalene that she has experienced the risen Lord, they have not done so for themselves, and so are still fearful of the Jewish authorities who were so hostile to Jesus and brought about his execution. Once Mary's message has been confirmed by their own experience, they respond with joy and the peace which the risen Jesus has bestowed on them.

Jesus "breathes" the Holy Spirit on them: at the moment of his expiring on the cross, he handed over his spirit to the two figures at the foot of the cross, his unnamed mother, who represents the community of disciples, and the anonymous disciple whom Jesus loved, who stands for the individual follower of Jesus. Earlier, the evangelist had observed that there was no Spirit since Jesus had not been glorified. For John, the crucifixion is the exaltation of Jesus in glory, so the Spirit can now be poured out. On the evening of Easter Day, the risen Jesus confers the Spirit on the assembled group of disciples to empower them to carry on his mission, which can only be accomplished with the presence of the Spirit of holiness. The peace that Jesus brings is not to be a comfort which allows the disciples to remain safely locked away, but will allow them to confront the world, just as Jesus did: we remember that the reason for Jesus' mission is that "God loved the world"; it is in this spirit that the disciples are now to take up and continue Jesus' work. ■

### LEARN

In the New Testament, the term "spirit" is neuter in gender: the appropriate pronoun would be "it".

In the Hebrew scriptures, the term "spirit" is feminine in gender: the appropriate pronoun, therefore, would be "she".

Pentecost is a Jewish festival (also known as the "Feast of Weeks"), commemorating God's self-revelation at Sinai and the giving of the Law (the Torah).

### REFLECT

This Gospel account is often referred to as "Little Pentecost", as it is so different to the dramatic account of Luke, with its "mighty, rushing wind" and "tongues of fire". Some writers refer to the Holy Spirit as "the forgotten person of the Trinity": if this is true, it is very unfortunate indeed, since the Spirit is the life-force of the Church and should be the driving power in the life of the individual Christian. But like any source of power, it will remain unused unless it is connected to the person and actively engaged in the disciple's life.

One way of understanding the Holy Spirit is to liken it to electricity, which can transform a simple light bulb, composed of metal and glass, into a source of light and heat, too bright to look at directly, too hot to handle unprotected. Perhaps some of us are reluctant to turn on the switch, afraid of what the Spirit might make us capable of. It can be more comfortable to stay in the locked room, safe from danger, real or imagined. That is not the purpose of the Spirit: it is to enable us to live as true disciples of Jesus and to teach others about our faith by example, if not by word. Often, attraction is more effective to others than direct and explicit promotion. ■

### DO

Switch on the light: consider the effects of the power of electricity. Apply this image to the Holy Spirit and yourself.



### SAY

**Attraction rather than promotion.**

(Twelve-Step Programme)



**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

The Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world  
and that which contains all things  
understands what is said, alleluia.

**GLORIA**

Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,  
we bless you,  
we adore you,  
we glorify you,  
we give you thanks for your great glory,  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,  
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,  
you take away the sins of the world,  
have mercy on us;  
you take away the sins of the world,  
receive our prayer;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,  
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.

**COLLECT**

O God, who by the mystery of today's great feast  
sanctify your whole Church in every people  
and nation,  
pour out, we pray, the gifts of the Holy Spirit  
across the face of the earth  
and, with the divine grace that was at work  
when the Gospel was first proclaimed,  
fill now once more the hearts of believers...  
Amen.

**FIRST READING**

Acts 2:1-11

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.  
When Pentecost day came round, the apostles  
had all met in one room, when suddenly they  
heard what sounded like a powerful wind  
from heaven, the noise of which filled the  
entire house in which they were sitting; and  
something appeared to them that seemed like  
tongues of fire; these separated and came to  
rest on the head of each of them. They were  
all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to  
speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave  
them the gift of speech.

Now there were devout men living in  
Jerusalem from every nation under heaven,  
and at this sound they all assembled, each  
one bewildered to hear these men speaking  
his own language. They were amazed and  
astonished. "Surely" they said "all these  
men speaking are Galileans? How does it  
happen that each of us hears them in his  
own native language? Parthians, Medes and  
Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judaea  
and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia  
and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya  
round Cyrene; as well as visitors from Rome  
– Jews and proselytes alike – Cretans and  
Arabs; we hear them preaching in our own  
language about the marvels of God."

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Psalm 103

Response:  
Send forth your Spirit, O Lord,  
and renew the face of the earth.  
or  
Alleluia!

1. Bless the Lord, my soul!  
Lord God, how great you are,  
How many are your works, O Lord!  
The earth is full of your riches. (R.)
2. You take back your spirit, they die,  
returning to the dust from which they  
came.  
You send forth your spirit, they are  
created;  
and you renew the face of the earth. (R.)
3. May the glory of the Lord last for ever!  
May the Lord rejoice in his works!  
May my thoughts be pleasing to him.  
I find my joy in the Lord. (R.)

**SECOND READING 1 Corinthians**

12:3-7, 12-13

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the  
Corinthians.

No one can say, "Jesus is Lord" unless he is  
under the influence of the Holy Spirit.  
There is a variety of gifts but always the same  
Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done,  
but always to the same Lord; working in all  
sorts of different ways in different people, it is  
the same God who is working in all of them.  
The particular way in which the Spirit is given  
to each person is for a good purpose.

Just as a human body, though it is made  
up of many parts, is a single unit because all  
these parts, though many, make one body, so  
it is with Christ. In the one Spirit we were all  
baptised, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as  
well as citizens, and one Spirit was given to  
us all to drink.

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

Or Galatians 5:16-25

**SEQUENCE**

Holy Spirit, Lord of Light,  
From the clear celestial height  
Thy pure beaming radiance give.

Come, thou Father of the poor,  
Come with treasures which endure;  
Come, thou light of all that live!

Thou, of all consolers best,  
Thou, the soul's delightful guest,  
Dost refreshing peace bestow.

Thou in toil art comfort sweet;  
Pleasant coolness in the heat;  
Solace in the midst of woe.

Light immortal, light divine,  
Visit thou these hearts of thine,  
And our inmost being fill:

If thou take thy grace away,  
Nothing pure in man will stay;  
All his good is turned to ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew;  
On our dryness pour thy dew;  
Wash the stains of guilt away:

Bend the stubborn heart and will;  
Melt the frozen, warn the chill;  
Guide the steps that go astray.

Thou, on us who evermore  
Thee confess and thee adore,  
With thy sevenfold gifts descend:

Give us comfort when we die;  
Give us life with thee on high;  
Give us joys that never end.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

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

**GOSPEL**

John 20:19-23

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
John.

In the evening of the first day of the week,  
the doors were closed in the room where the  
disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus  
came and stood among them. He said to  
them, "Peace be with you," and showed them  
his hands and his side. The disciples were  
filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he  
said to them again, "Peace be with you.

"As the Father sent me,  
so am I sending you."

After saying this he breathed on them and  
said:

"Receive the Holy Spirit.  
For those whose sins you forgive,  
they are forgiven;  
for those whose sins you retain,  
they are retained."

The Gospel of the Lord.  
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Or John 15:26-27; 16:12-15

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

(all bow during the next two lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended into hell;  
on the third day he rose again from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of God the  
Father almighty;  
from there he will come to judge the living  
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting.  
Amen.

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

Grant, we pray, O Lord,  
that, as promised by your Son,  
the Holy Spirit may reveal to us more  
abundantly  
the hidden mystery of this sacrifice  
and graciously lead us into all truth.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit  
and spoke of the marvels of God, alleluia.

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

O God, who bestow heavenly gifts upon your  
Church,  
safeguard, we pray, the grace you have given,  
that the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out  
upon her  
may retain all its force  
and that this spiritual food  
may gain her abundance of eternal  
redemption...  
Amen.

