

# Four Faces of the Holy Spirit

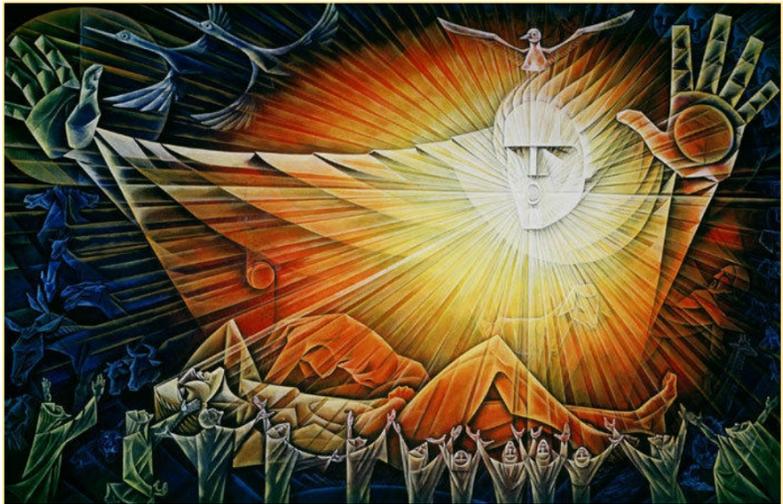
Pentecost 2019

Come, Holy Spirit, Come!

As a gentle loving breath or strong driving wind, the Holy Spirit comes today showing us at least four faces – mercy, justice, understanding and peace.

The Church, in her loving kindness, gives us two powerful, different, and complimentary images of Pentecost. The first is a loving breath and the second, a driving wind.

The [Gospel of John](#) (20:19-23) has the frightened disciples gathered behind locked doors on the morning of the first day of the week. Suddenly, Jesus, risen from the dead, is with them. “Peace be with you,” he says to them and shows them his wounds. The disciples rejoice seeing the Lord. “Peace, be with you,” Jesus says again and then adds, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Then he breathes on them, like the gentle breeze through Elijah’s cave or a mother’s face to face play with her infant, and Jesus says “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”



The Korean artist [Kim Young Gil](#) (1940-2008) was inspired by today’s gospel but Ezekiel’s dry bones.

Jesus comes in peace to be with us, his disciples. He sends us – just as the Father sent him – to bring mercy to sinners and justice to those whose sins cannot be forgiven. Jesus gives us, his disciples, his Spirit and with that the power to forgive sins, to lavish the mercy of God on those who have failed God, neighbor, or self, and the power to retain sin so justice is served.

Sin makes us uncomfortable. It should. It is still real and pervasive in our own hearts and minds, in our society, and in our world. It is a happy day, as the song says, when we are truthful enough about ourselves, and our society, to see and repent of our sins and to let Jesus wash those sins away. Perhaps some sins are retained – like the sexual abuse of children by priests and the failure of our bishops to deal with this “laceration” of the Body of Christ – because the full truth of this sin is still being revealed. Purification has its own time. Salvation is not just for us personally, it is for our neighborhood and city, our family, extended family, our tribe, the organizations we work in, and the groups we belong to. All of us “have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

The second Pentecost story is the one we know so well – from the Acts of the Apostles – when the time was right, the disciples were in one place, a strong driving wind comes from the sky filling the house, and the Holy Spirit came, like tongues of fire, that part to rest on each one of them, filling

each of them with the Holy Spirit, and giving them the power to speak in foreign languages so they could proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit comes – filling the house and filling each one of us – giving us the power to speak and understand people with a different language, culture, way of life. The Gospel transcends all cultures which means it can hold all cultures – purifying, illuminating, and unifying them.

The Holy Spirit comes – just like Jesus – not to condemn mankind but to save it. The Holy Spirit comes as peace – both a pledge and a promise. We are called to wholeness and holiness – individually, as a community, as a country and as a world. We have the power to recognize sin. We have the power to forgive sin. We have the power to retain sin in service to justice and mercy. We have the power to transcend ourselves, move outside of our comfort zone, cross borders of language, class, economics, or culture, and encounter the stranger as a sister or brother. We can be peacemakers. We can be handmaids to the Kingdom of God.

We, as Catholic Christians living in the United States of America in the year 2019 – just a couple of decades into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, less than 2% into the third millennium – would do well to upgrade our appreciation, and appropriation, of Pentecost. It is not just another memorial of something that happened long ago. No, it is the font of all that has happened in and through the Church. We are Spirit folk now. The Spirit drove Jesus into the desert and now the Spirit sends us into the world to transform the world with the power of the Gospel. In one sense, “ordinary time” is the season of Pentecost because it focuses on how the community of disciples, over time, in time, and through time, live out the mission Jesus entrusted to us.

Let us challenge ourselves this Pentecost to be Spirit folk. What does that look like? Come together in prayer and discernment and ask where God is sending your community of faith. Are you being sent to the peripheries within your own neighborhood or city? Perhaps there is a home mission God is calling you to, or a global mission? Your community may be so gifted that God is calling you to all three. Second, identify everyone within your community that has had some experience of mission – of being sent in service to others. Third, convene the community for a mission on mission. Fourth, build Cenacle time – when the community comes together in prayer seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit – annually. Fifth, celebrate the vigil of Pentecost – waiting for the Spirit to come to send you forth to the “ends of the earth.”

It will not be comfortable. We will need to leave the flesh pots of Egypt to enter deeply into mission because our witness needs purification, our prayer and worship authenticity, our dialogue modesty and confidence, enculturation epic and iconic, justice real and immediate, and reconciliation all encompassing. We are not alone. We enter mission with others, we are sent on mission with others, we have the communion of saints to accompany us, and Jesus himself will be with us “to the end of the age.”

Come, Holy Spirit, Come! Fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love ... and you shall renew the face of the earth.

This reflection is a service of the United States Catholic Mission Association offered with love and hope. 415 Michigan Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20017 – 202-832-3112  
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