

by Shawn Madigan, CSJ

**O**n the Feast of Pentecost Jews blessed new wine, a practice referred to in Acts 2:13. Place a glass of wine or cranberry juice, red candles, and spring flowers near an open bible at the center of your group.

**LEADER:** No one can say Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit.

**ALL:** There are many gifts but one Spirit.

**LEADER:** To each of us, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the good of the community.

**ALL:** It was in one spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptized into one body.

**SONG:** Come, Spirit, Come  
(Tune: Come, Holy Ghost)

*Come, Spirit, come.  
Embrace the earth.  
Come with your gifts  
to bring us new birth.  
Flame into life embers of love  
with your anointing from above;  
with your anointing from above.*

*O Comforter, to you we cry.  
Come with your Wisdom  
to raise us on high.  
Come with your power;  
make all war cease.  
Renew the earth in love and peace.  
Renew the earth in love and peace.*

**LEADER:** Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.

**ALL:** Kindle in us the fire of your love.

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# SUNDAY

## by SUNDAY

**A** 50-day celebration of Easter follows the 40 days of Lent. Most Catholics probably do better at keeping Lent than celebrating Easter. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days we feel guilty about not observing in some way. The Stations of the Cross appear on the walls of every Catholic church.

However, the Church celebrates Easter longer and with greater enthusiasm than Lent. Easter celebrates the central mystery of our faith: Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday evening inaugurates 50 days of joy that culminate on Pentecost, when Christians celebrate Jesus' sending of the

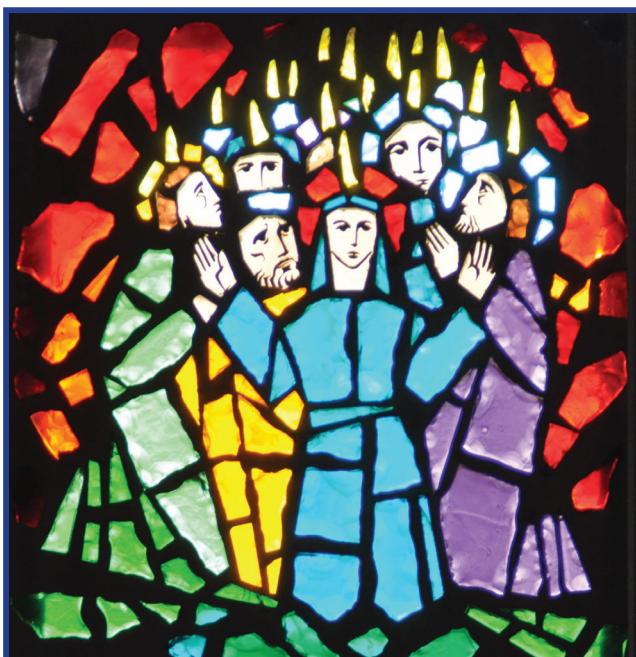
Holy Spirit on his followers. During this season we read from Jesus' farewell to his disciples in John's gospel, chapters that explore our continuing relationship with the risen Jesus, his Father and Spirit.

The Church father Athanasius refers to these 50 days of Easter joy as the "Great Sunday." In Gaul in AD 110, St. Irenaeus directs Christians not to kneel during the Pentecost season. Kneeling connotes penitence. The church of Carthage also forbids kneeling (AD 210).

The joy of the risen Jesus' continuing presence and the Spirit's coming affected how early Christians prayed. In AD

325, the Council of Nicaea formalized the practice of not kneeling for the whole Church. It described the 50 days of Easter as the new creation ushered in by the risen Christ.

Symbolically, the 50th day is a day of fullness. In ancient numerology seven is the number of perfection. Seven times seven plus one, 50, is like perfect



times perfect, plus. The 50th day points to Jesus' second coming, the fullness of all creation in Christ.

The Pentecost scriptures envision a transformation of the world in Christ by a community whose members are always in need of transformation themselves. The Spirit provides the gifts for renewing the face of the earth.

- How have you experienced coming to life again and finding joy this Easter season?

# GOSPEL

## Jesus brings power and peace.



**NARRATOR:** When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them.

**JESUS:** Peace be with you.

**NARRATOR:** After this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

**JESUS:** Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

**NARRATOR:** Then he breathed on them and said:

**JESUS:** Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.

John 20.19-23

## The Christian community receives power to forgive.

**O**n the evening of the first Easter, the risen Jesus breathes his spirit upon the disciples assembled in a locked room. Breath is the invisible life within us. In this Easter scene the disciples receive Jesus' spirit rather than fire.

As he dies in John's gospel, Jesus gives over his spirit (19.30). He says, "It is finished." His life is about to end. The words also affirm he has completed his mission. Jesus bows his head and dies. For John, this is Jesus' hour, his glorification. Though Jesus hangs powerless on the cross, he freely gives himself out of love. This lifting up on the cross is Jesus' enthronement. He hands on his spirit to his followers.

As Jesus stands among his disciples on Easter evening, he shows them his hands and side. John wants us to recognize the

risen Jesus is the crucified Jesus. The one who gifts the community with his Spirit is he whose wounds remain in his glorified body. John's gospel sees an integrity in Jesus' death, resurrection, and handing over of his Spirit—a single event.

John is unique in not designating the twelve as the receivers of the peace and power of the Spirit. In Sunday's gospel, the whole community of believers receives peace and the power to forgive.

If the community graciously shares the peace and forgiveness Jesus bestows on them, then the Spirit lives in their midst. It is not the twelve who have a priority on the commission to forgive. Forgiveness, like love and peace, is the community's to

share, for we are the Body of Christ. The commission is ours.

- How does the presence of the Spirit in each Christian help provide ministers in your faith community?

- Whom have you forgiven? How has forgiving or being forgiven renewed you, your family, parish community, or work place?

**O**ur relationships bind families and communities together. How we love and forgive one another matters in concrete, lasting ways. The Spirit is always with us, in our failures and pain as surely as in our joys and achievements. The Spirit stirs in regrets as surely as in moments of communion or shared insights.

To send his friends forth with the good news of Easter, the risen Jesus breathes the Spirit on the community. This is a sacramental scene. Breathing is Jesus' sign of the Spirit of God's power in us—invisible but life-essential air, moving into our lungs, heart, and blood, animating every cell of our bodies, coextensive with being alive. The Holy Spirit is a transforming gift in us.

The Spirit calls us always toward peace, unity, and new life. Our prayer, "Come, Holy Spirit," reminds us to pay attention to the Spirit's prodding. Where bitterness, grudges, greed, pride, estrangement, addiction put up walls, freeze people out, fray family and friendship bonds, there the Spirit unsettles us, looking to mend.

The Spirit thaws the frozen, bends the stubborn, shakes the arrogant. The giver of life empowers us to be life givers in our relationships and continuously renew the face of the earth.

● **What is one peacemaking action you can do?**

● **What is a peacemaking action you no longer want to put off?**

**B**elief in Jesus includes believing in the God who sent Jesus and the Spirit that Jesus breathes upon the community with the power to forgive and bind. The power



of forgiveness the Spirit bestows will act through the community.

In John's gospel staying in unbelief in Jesus is a sin (8.24; 9.41). Faith in Jesus Christ forgives the sin of unbelief. The faith of the believing community is a source for drawing others to accept Jesus Christ, and thus to be forgiven.

New believers receive the peace and the power of the Spirit. They live because Jesus lives (John 14.19). No one can take their joy away (John 16.22). The Father will give all that the believer asks for in Jesus' name (John 16.24). Pentecost is any day and every day that we open our hearts to the Spirit who seeks through the believer to renew the face of the earth.

● **Imagine a celebration of Pentecost in your parish which expresses the full meaning of the gifts of the Spirit in the Christian community.**

## FIRST READING

### The language of the Spirit speaks to all.

**T**he first Christian Pentecost happens on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, a feast of God's love and law. Those who believe in Jesus have gathered in one enclosed place. When tongues of fire inflame their hearts, they leave their enclosed place and step among people gathered from all over the world.

In this symbolic world space, they speak in the Spirit of a love that renews the face of the earth. Christ Jesus is the one whose Spirit can fill the hearts of all who seek God. They need only come to the water and be baptized in his name.

The scene Luke depicts reverses the confusion of tongues God created among the people who aspired to build a tower to heaven in the Tower of Babel story (Genesis 11.1-11). In this Old Testament

story diverse languages cause dissension, end construction of the tower, and scatter people over all the earth.

In the Christian Pentecost story, language unites in spite of the diversity. People from many nations hear Jesus' inspired witnesses in a language each understands! This is the language of the Spirit whose fruits are joy, peace, love.

Language has power. Spoken language, body language, written language—all have power to destroy as well as to gather and build up the common good. Language can include or exclude, equalize or discriminate. The language of the Spirit is inclusive, renewing, and creative.

## Jesus sends his Spirit.

The day of Pentecost found the men and women who believed in Jesus all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. At this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered because all heard them speaking in their native languages.

Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who

are speaking Galileans? How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

"Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

Acts 2:1-11

- What language does our Church speak?
- How inclusive and gracious are the words we speak at home and work? Where have your words or actions caused unintentional offense? What can you do to break boundaries they have created?
- What reforms of worship, prayer, and ministry do you see the Spirit inspiring in our midst?

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# PRAY

The Sequence from the Pentecost Liturgy of the Word describes the work of the Spirit in our lives and world. Pray it together.

**LEADER:** Come, Holy Spirit, come. From your celestial home shed your ray of life divine.

**ALL:** Come to us whenever we call; you are Comforter of all. On your poor, let solace shine.

**LEADER:** In our labor, you give rest. Be our hearts' indwelling Guest. You are joy forever near.

**ALL:** Heal our wounds. Our hearts renew. On our dryness shed your dew. Wash the guilt of sin away.

**LEADER:** Bend our stubborn hearts and will. Melt what's frozen; warm the chill. Guide the steps that go astray.

**ALL:** Renew the faithful who adore and confess you evermore. Let your sevenfold gifts descend.

**LEADER:** Let us each pledge with the cup of wine (or juice) to use the gifts of the Spirit in us. Pass the cup.

## DO SOMETHING



- Visit [reachoutandread.org](http://reachoutandread.org) to include reading in their medical care of young children. Reading aloud with children and talking with them increases vocabulary and promotes brain development. Reach Out and Read provides books and helps parents value reading and talking with their children. In their book *A Path Appears* (2014), Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn report studies that show a 30-million-word gap at age 4 between a child whose parents who have to work long hours at low-wage jobs.

