

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place a lighted candle and open bible at the center of your group. Pray by alternating lines from Psalm 139 below.

1: Where can I go from your Spirit, O God?

2: Where can I flee from your presence?

1: If I ascend to heaven, you are there.

2: If I rest in the earth, you are there.

1: If I take the wings of morning

2: And settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

ALL: Even there your hand will lead me.

Pentecost is the birthday of the Christian community, its baptism in the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit that first stirs the dark waters of chaos at creation, the same Spirit that God breathes into the first human, the same Spirit Ezekiel envisions bringing dry bones back to life—this same Spirit Jesus breathes upon the community of very ordinary disciples who gather in fear and confusion on the evening of the first Easter.

These disciples whom John's gospel places behind locked doors have no common purpose yet, no flow chart for organizing a church, nor any experience with membership drives. The company of 120 whom Luke describes waiting for the Spirit on Pentecost

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in Acts have no training in public speaking nor any written traditions of Jesus' teaching.

The men and women who receive the Holy Spirit have only their lived experience of Jesus out of which to weave a new community. They followed Jesus in his ministry. They left their homes and livelihoods to be with him, to learn by his doing, to absorb his teaching. They witnessed his healing, forgiving, freeing outreach to poor, forgotten, and marginalized people. They experienced the hopeless defeat of his death and the awakening of new promise and purpose with his resurrection.

Our world today challenges us to live the gospel globally. On our behalf Catholic Relief Service has established global humanitarian networks that reach out to people suffering poverty, war, and disaster and do the works of mercy. Religious orders have put Catholic social teaching into action in schools, hospitals, and social service agencies.

We of the third millennia have seen Earth from space. We can phone home from almost anywhere on the globe. Evolution tells us we are part of one great whole. Our mission seems clear.

● To what does celebrating Pentecost this year call you?



GOSPEL

Jesus breathes Spirit and peace upon his disciples.

NARRATOR: When it was evening on 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 he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

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

NARRATOR: When he had said this, 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



Jesus sends his disciples to continue his mission.

When Jesus comes among his fearful disciples in Sunday's gospel, he gives them peace, purpose, and animating Spirit. In John's gospel the giving of the Spirit is an Easter event, part of Jesus' glorification and return to God, part of his followers taking up his mission. It takes place on the evening of the first Easter Sunday.

The gospel tells us Jesus' friends have created space where they can gather, pray, and grasp the unfolding events. Mary Magdalene reports Jesus' tomb empty. The beloved disciple believes Jesus is risen. Peter is silent. Mary Magdalene stays at the tomb grieving where she

meets Jesus risen and returns to the community to announce, "I have seen the Lord."

When they lock themselves in a room together, Jesus' friends are also locking out the Jewish leaders who had the Romans put Jesus to death. Jesus' followers are all Jews; the people they fear are their religious leaders who found Jesus a threat.

Jesus' disciples are ordinary Jewish people. None among them is a learned teacher of Israel's scriptures or a landowner with wealth. They come from the farming and fishing villages of Galilee. We who venerate these disciples as saints and apostles of our 2000-year-old Church need to remember their humble

origins and not see them in the gilded clothing of church statues.

Among these humble and very human disciples are some whose feet Jesus washed at the last supper. Among them are some who fled when Jesus was arrested and some who stood at Jesus' cross as he died. Among them is Peter, who denied he knew Jesus at his trial and made nothing of the empty tomb that Mary Magdalene took him to see on Easter morning.

● If you have a group, consider speaking and praying as one of Jesus' followers and dramatize the Easter evening together.

Presence and peace are Jesus' first gifts. He lets his friends see the wounds in his hands, feet, and side. This intimate act demonstrates for every hearer of the story that the risen Jesus is the crucified Jesus.

In this Easter appearance Jesus gives his friends purpose, which makes the passage a fitting Pentecost gospel. Jesus sends them as the Father sent him. He commissions them and us to continue his mission. For this purpose Jesus breathes his animating Spirit upon them just as the Creator breathed life into the first humans in Genesis 2.24.

The invisible, enlivening breath points to the mystery of divine energy in us. The Spirit in whom we live, move, and have being immerses us in the dynamic love of the Trinity.

We experience God as Spirit continuously present within our own spirits, in relationships among us, and in the events of our history. The Spirit is the giver of our lives. The Spirit lives in, with, and among us in sorrows and joys, in threats and wonders, tragedies and reunions, breakups and breakthroughs, in mourning and in yearning, in rage and delight.

People too often attribute their successes to God and their failures to themselves. When things go well, we often say God did it. It's not our work. But it is. The Spirit does not work apart from our human effort. The Spirit permeates our lives, our anguish as well as our joy, all that we struggle with as well as all that comes easy.

- **When have you been aware of the Spirit's presence in anguish? In joy?**
- **What nudgings of the Spirit do you perceive recurring in you? How do you respond?**
- **What gifts of the Spirit do you recognize in your actions toward your neighbors?**

The coming of the Spirit in Sunday's gospel doesn't involve

dramatic tongues of fire, strong wind, and speaking in many languages. To his disciples who gather, feeling fear and shame on this Easter evening, Jesus brings the call to become a reconciling community that forgives or retain sins. Most of us assume only pope, bishops, and priests have such power, but here the whole gathered community receives this charge. Without forgiving, hurts and failures can fester in both the doer and the receiver.

A community that continues in Jesus' name must be a forgiving people. Forgiving others creates life-giving bonds. Forgetting hurts and grudges frees us for loving one another. Holding on to hurts and grudges keeps us bound and apart.

The risen Jesus forgives and frees his disciples of their fear to become a forgiving presence in our world. He missions the community and us to spread the joy and peace they share.

- **How has being forgiven changed you? How has it made you more forgiving?**
- **How has forgiving someone changed you?**
- **What peace is within your power to give to someone this week?**



**FIRST
READING**

Jesus' disciples find voice.

The Feast of Pentecost is not only about Jesus' disciples finding a motivating mission but about their finding voice—words for expressing their experience of Jesus.

Any powerful, spiritual experience defies words. The awe one feels at a baby's birth or at a mountain view can't be wholly communicated. Yet finding one's voice is essential to finding one's identity and practicing personal power. In the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus' disciples find irrepressible voices for their lived experience of his ministry, death, and resurrection.

Luke pictures 120 of Jesus' men and women disciples, including Jesus' mother, gathered in a room, awaiting the Spirit Jesus promised them when he returned to God. The wind and fire of the Spirit transform the community from voiceless expectation to fiery speech.



The Jews that form the crowd hear them in their own languages. These visitors have come to Jerusalem for the feast from every direction—from Mesopotamia in the east and Egypt in the south, from Rome and Libya to the west, from Pamphylia to the north. The listeners come from areas to which Jesus' fiery preachers will spread his message.

At Pentecost, the lived experience of Jesus' followers begins to become speech—sermons, stories, parables, dialogs, hymns. Over the first century this fiery speech is handed on and develops into the New Testament.

The Pentecost event continues in our time as we still translate and hear Jesus' good news in every language today. We continue Pentecost as we interpret this word for our lives.

Fiery tongues, new speech

When the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled, they were 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. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And 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

- Around what issues does your tongue catch fire when you are discussing?
- In your experience what fire do the gospels hold, what power to bring people to faith that Jesus is Lord?

PRAY

Conclude your reflection on the Pentecost scriptures by praying Sunday's second reading below together.

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

ALL: There are different gifts but the same Spirit.

LEADER: Different ministries—

ALL: But the same Lord.

LEADER: Different works—

ALL: But the same God who accomplishes all of them in everyone.

LEADER: Let us name gifts that are irrepressible in the members of our group. *(Pause for naming gifts.)*

ALL: To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.



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DO SOMETHING

CHARITY

JUSTICE

- Read Global Sisters Report at NCR.org.
- For 100 years Zonta International has organized professional women in service and advocacy projects for girls and women around the world. Since 1972, Zonta has partnered with the United Nations High Commission on Refugees. Read about their work at UNHCR.org.

Pentecost Prayer

Invite the Holy Spirit into your life this week. Go to goodgroundpress.com and download the Pentecost Sequence. Pray a bit of it each day. Light on whatever words inspire or comfort you. Sit with them for a moment. Then ask the Spirit to help you be aware of the graces that will come to you that day. Close with prayers of thanks.