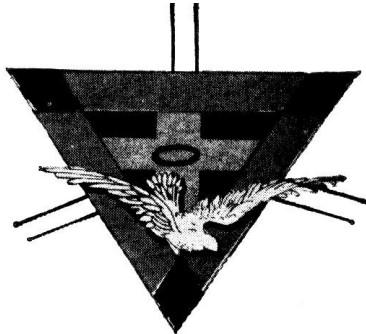


# Pentecost:

## the Gift of God's Spirit and the Birth of the Church



(Design drawn by Sr. Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil.)

*The Catholic Church teaches that the fathomless mystery we call God has revealed Himself to humankind as a Trinity of Persons – The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. ... All effects of God's action upon his creatures are produced by the three divine Persons in common. But because certain effects of the divine action in creation remind us more of one divine Person than another, the Church ascribes particular effects to one or the other divine Person. Thus, we speak of the Father as Creator of all that is, of the Son, the Word of God, as our Savior or Redeemer, and of the Holy Spirit – the love of God “poured into our hearts” – as our Sanctifier.*

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 249-256; 234-237.)

Because the concept of a Trinity of distinct persons in the unity of one Godhead would be a concept too difficult for our small human minds to grasp, God revealed Himself to us gradually over time and through His works in more tangible realities compatible with our human way of learning through our senses. Thus God established the age of glory of the Father, creating the universe and mankind, forming a concrete people as His own, making a Covenant with them, carving His Law in stone to guide them, and promising a Savior Who would be a Perfect Sacrifice to atone for their sins and Who would reopen the gates of Heaven that were closed to all by Adam's sin. God then proceeded to unfold the age of glory of the Son, whose birth was the fulfillment of the Promised Messiah, whose death made perfect satisfaction for sin and reconciled us to the Father, and whose Resurrection is a new promise of our own resurrection and salvation into the eternal glory of our Triune God, if we believe in Jesus and accept Him as our personal Lord and Savior. As Jesus promised on leaving our earth and

returning to His Father, a new Advocate would be sent by them, and was, on Pentecost, and the present age of glory of the Holy Spirit is poured out upon us and is made manifest in Christ's Church, established as the New Ark of a New Covenant that will effect our transformation into the image of the Son that is so pleasing to the Father, who will then look upon us as His beloved in the communion of their Love, their Spirit. Ah, this is fully realized in the beatific vision of heaven. There is no greater glory!

St. Paul used this theme of glory in his writings, not only referring to the unfolding revelation of the three Persons of the Trinity in human history, but referring also to the quiet work of the Holy Spirit in each soul, bringing it from one level of glory and union with God to another through the grace of the Indwelling Trinity. Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity would take this same theme from St. Paul and develop her whole mystical doctrine, *Laudem Gloriam* "in praise of glory," growing from "glory to glory" in our union with God.

*The Old Testament proclaimed the Father clearly, but the Son more obscurely. The New Testament revealed the Son and gave us a glimpse of the divinity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells among us and grants us a clearer vision of Himself. It was not prudent, when the divinity of the Father had not yet been confessed, to proclaim the Son openly and, when the divinity of the Son was not yet admitted, to add the Holy Spirit as an extra burden, to speak somewhat daringly.... By advancing and progressing "from glory to glory," the light of the Trinity will shine in ever more brilliant rays.*

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, #684. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, the Theologian, explains this progression in terms of the pedagogy of divine "condescension.")

We have many symbols in our Christian Faith that help us understand the nature and work of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity who brings to completion the work begun in us with the Father through creation, with the Son through redemption, and finally, with Himself through sanctification as He leads us from glory to glory until we reach fulfillment in the beatific vision of the Trinity Itself in heaven. The time before Christ might be called the age of the Father; the time from Christ's birth until Pentecost the age of the Son; and the time from Pentecost until the end of time, the age of the Holy Spirit and the age of the Church, founded by Christ and guided and protected by the Spirit of God, to be a Holy Mother to us until Jesus comes again in all His glory.

A powerful symbol of God's Holy Spirit is that of "wind." Interestingly the Hebrew word for Spirit is "ruah", meaning wind, breath, air. The Book of Genesis in the Hebrew Testament gives us the story of creation but the Trinity is referred to as God and the distinction of persons is veiled. There God is creating the

heavens and the earth from a vast wasteland covered in darkness while a mighty wind sweeps over the waters. The passage continues that God spoke, and then there was whatever He called into being. Here God as Father initiates the action; the Word spoken is the Son, the Father's image or knowledge of Himself which is the model for all creation; and the wind is the Spirit that stirs the waters to provide life for all that is created. The Father is the focus in the unfolding of this creation story, but in John's Gospel, John speaks of creation in terms focused on the Son, the Word or Logos of God, in Whom and through Whom all things were made. John goes on to speak that those who accept the Son become children of God, not by way of natural generation but by the power of God through the Word made flesh, which later he testifies took place in Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit hovering over her. This is grace, divine sonship, offered to us by way of adoption through Jesus. The Spirit is the very Love itself of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father in the inner life of the Trinity and becomes that same force of unity and love between Abba, Father, and his other "sons," all of us. It is a wondrous circle of life.

We see this "wind" theme again on Pentecost itself. Mary, the apostles and the rest of the 120 disciples were gathered in the Cenacle room where Jesus, prior to His Ascension, had commanded them to go to pray and wait for the New Advocate. They were startled by the noise of a strong driving wind that came from the sky and filled that place. Here the action of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, is forceful and bold and empowers those huddled in their fear of persecution to go out and preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and even to die for their faith in the Lord. That same Spirit will make us bold, casting out our fear with more perfect love for the Sacred Humanity and Abba, and will impel us to proclaim the Good News of Jesus and His Father to everyone.

"Ruah" is also used to symbolize the "breath" of God. This is a more gentle expression of the same truth. We see it, too, in Genesis with the creation of man as God forms Adam out of the dust and then breathes life into Him. As Adam sleeps, God forms Eve from a wound in his side and gives her life from the rib He had taken from Adam. This breath of life is seen also in the Book of Ezekiel with the vision of the dry bones as the prophet is led out onto a plain filled with dry bones. Then God speaks to the bones about breathing spirit into them to bring them to life:

**See! I will bring spirit into you that you may come to life. I will put sinews upon you, make flesh grow over you, cover you with skin and put spirit in you so that you may come to life and know that I am the Lord. (New American Bible, Ezekiel 37: 5-7.)**

We see that theme of "the breath of God, in the New Testament when Jesus takes the hand of the daughter of Jairus and breath returns to her dead body at His command to her to arise. It is seen in a new way on Calvary as Jesus gives

**up his human spirit, His last breath, and pours out His Divine Spirit from the wound in his side,** and, as the New Adam, brings forth His Bride, Holy Mother Church, represented in the person of John, a Mother who will nurture us in the grace His death has won for us. That Holy Spirit poured out for us on Calvary and at that first Pentecost is the same Spirit who breathes a share of God's very own life into us with the sanctifying grace of Baptism that unites us as one living body with Jesus our Lord. If only we knew what a gift we have received! The Breath of God breathing divine life into our souls!

Baptism carries other symbols of the Spirit, too, most notably that of **"water."** In Genesis the Spirit hovered over the waters to bring life and harmony to nature. In the story of the flood we see water as a symbol of cleansing from the death of sin, a purification so that life might be recreated and renewed in promise. We see Moses strike the rock in the desert to bring forth water to quench the thirst of God's people to save them from death. We see that same compassion in the New Testament when Jesus says:

*Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: "Rivers of living water will flow from within him." He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. (John 7: 37-39.)*

We see the water of the Red Sea become the means of salvation for the Chosen Ones but the means of destruction for those who would not accept God's ways. We see the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda. For thirty-eight years he waited to enter the pool after the angel stirred the waters so he might be healed but had no one to help him in. At Jesus' word to pick up his mat and walk, he was healed in body and soul. We see Jesus turn water into wine at a wedding feast. All these symbols and gestures speak to the inner life of God that is the power of the Spirit of God, cleansing, purifying, transforming and re-creating, restoring harmony and order to the disharmony original sin and our own sin brings to our natures. In Baptism especially we see that cleansing from sin and an in-pouring of the very life of God that changes us ontologically into a new creation so we no longer live on a merely natural level but on a supernatural one. The waters of Bethesda speak to the cleansing of the soul from sin in Reconciliation and from the bondage of the evil spirits of disease and sickness. It is the Spirit who gives us the humility to see the truth of our false self and Satan's lies and cries out from within us with our need for redemption and trust in God's mercy. The water turned into wine speaks of the calling down of the Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine on the Eucharistic table, and the prayer pleads that the Spirit might transform these gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ, the Real Presence, and us into Christ's Mystical Body, as we partake of the Bread of Life. In so many ways the Spirit gives us life and re-creates us. The Book of

Revelations, like John's Gospel, identifies the Spirit as a **"river of living water"** that pours out on us the abundant life of Christ Jesus our Lord from the kingdom of our Father that is the City of God, where the day never ends and there is only light, the kingdom that is already within us through grace. Glory to glory we grow in union with Father and Son and Holy Spirit, and with all Who are one in and through and with Them.

**'Fire'** is also a symbol of the Spirit of God. We see it in the burning bush on Mt. Sinai when God identified Himself to Moses as **"I Am."** The Spirit is the force of that flaming love of God that consumes without destroying. We see it again on Pentecost in the tongues of fire that enabled those enflamed with the love of God to speak God's language to others who are given simultaneously the gift of hearing. It is the Spirit Who is the fire of love in the inner life of the Trinity and is the same fire of love communicated to us when we are united to the Sacred Humanity in the Cenacle of our own hearts. The pillar of fire was the sign of God's presence with His people as it led them through the desert at night, guiding and illuminating them on their journey. So, too, we speak of the Spirit as the one who illuminates our minds and sets fire to our hearts that we might see the truth of God that is Jesus, our Pillar of salvation.

At other times, God's Presence was seen in the **"cloud"** that hovered over his people, a cloud filled with dew to rain blessing upon them as they traveled. This cloud spoke of the ways God is hidden and mysterious as well as revealing and luminous in His Spirit Whom Jesus said would come after Him to teach us the meaning of all that He had said and done. It is the Spirit who clarifies Truth, exposes the demons, and guides our way and illumines our understanding, transforming us more and more into the image of the Beloved of God.

Perhaps the most artistically and often portrayed symbol of the Holy Spirit is that of the **"dove."** (See Understanding the Message, "My Little White Dove.") The dove first appeared in our human story at the flood when Noah sent it out to see if the waters had receded. It came back with an olive branch, an image that has become the accepted symbol of peace, for it tells us the war of purification is over and order is restored and life can prosper again. Sometimes the symbol of two doves is used to connote married love, or the love between Christ and His Bride, the Church. The dove is clear testimony to the Spirit of God when it rested on the shoulder of Jesus at His baptism by John in the Jordan. Sometimes the Spirit works in dramatic ways, rapidly, with power and force like with the wind or rivers of running water or the flame of fire that spreads quickly. Most of the time the Spirit works like the dove, quietly, humbly, hidden in the nooks and crannies of our souls, resting there and stirring our Faith with God's Wisdom, fanning our little tongues of fire into pillars of flaming love for the Lord and all who are His. Sometimes He just whispers God's secrets and endearments to us softly and gently in the quiet of our inner rooms, His sanctuaries, and bids us be still and

know that He is God, be still and wait on Him, for He is full of miracles and surprises, all in His good time.

It is this symbol of the Spirit as dove that speaks so clearly to the message of **Our Lady of America®**, for Our Lord Himself called Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil, the visionary, His “little white dove.” She exemplified the purity and peacefulness, the humble, hidden and mysterious ways of the Spirit, the slow, deep growth into union with God that is at the heart of the contemplative life. How often she was observed, in quiet rapture, a dove on her lap, angels all around her. She became a *Laudem Gloriam*, praise of God’s glory, and in turn, became His *Vocem Laudis*, the voice of His praise as she proclaimed it to others. In the message Our Lady speaks of her anxious concern about our interior lives and an urgently needed “reform of life,” “sanctification from within” through union with the Indwelling Trinity. She speaks of the need for purification, that refining fire of the Spirit perfected within us through suffering. It is the Holy Spirit who is the Master of the Interior Life, the heart of the Divine Indwelling. It is He who prays within us before the throne of the Father in the Word of Jesus. It is He Who, having filled Mary, the Mother of God, Mother of Jesus, with the fullness of grace, will fill us with that grace, too, in the measure in which we allow God to love us.

Let us sit with Mary and those dear ones of God and ponder this truth:

*Baptism gives us the grace of new birth in God the Father, through his Son, in the Holy Spirit. For those who bear God's Spirit are led to the Word, that is, to the Son, and the Son presents them to the Father, and the Father confers incorruptibility on them. And it is impossible to see God's Son without the Spirit, and no one can approach the Father without the Son, for the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of God's Son is obtained through the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>*

This grace of the Indwelling God that makes us a new creation is poured out upon us in the final stage of God’s glory, the age of the Holy Spirit, and is made manifest through the Church, the visible sign of Christ’s continued presence on earth. Mary, Mother of the Sacred Humanity, the physical Body of Christ, is now Mother of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, symbolized in her taking John, the son by “entrustment,” as her own. We have all been entrusted to our Mother on earth, the Church, and to our heavenly Mother, Mary. Pentecost is God’s confirmation of the gift of the Spirit to us and of the birth and gift of the Church that mediates to us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, all the grace Christ has won for us.

When we speak of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, let us remember that there are gifts given for our own personal growth in holiness and there are gifts, charisms, given for the growth in holiness of the Church, **but the power and the**

**profundity of the gifts of the Spirit can never be limited.** The Spirit blows where and when He wills, for the glory of God. Each of us is not only *given a gift* that is uniquely ours to be a song of praise to the All Holy One, a praise no other can give, but each *IS a gift*, for life itself is the gift of all gifts born out of the bosom of the Father's Love. **Life is always sacred in God's sight**, and should be in ours, too.

Let us pray for a Pentecost like we have never seen before on the face of the earth. Let us pray God's Spirit will make Him manifest on this earth in a way no science can ever deny and from which no heart can turn away. Let every heart see itself as God sees it, and may each of us fall prostrate in that knowledge, recognizing our sinfulness and our great need of a Redeemer to mercifully save us from ourselves and from those evil spirits that seek to devour us by disguising themselves as good. Let us see, too, the glory God yearns to share with us!

The message of **Our Lady of America®** is calling us back to life, **the interior life from which all action flows**, for we have lost our way with lack of spiritual vision, have grown feeble with lack of holy spirit, have locked ourselves out of our own souls that have no inner room for rest, and have become distant from the very God who is the only One Who can truly satisfy us, for He made us for Himself and our hearts are ever restless until we rest in Him. We are the dead bones on the plain in Ezekiel's vision. May God pour out His Spirit upon us and bring us back to life so we may serve Him and rise up to be with Him, forever!

**Will we choose life, life in the Spirit, or will we remain skeletons  
on the plains of Ezekiel's vision?  
The choice is ours!**

Copyright © Contemplative Sisters of the Indwelling Trinity, 2009.