

Pentecost

THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

INVOCATION

+ In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

This is the day the Lord has made. Alleluia!

Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Alleluia!

God has given us his Spirit. Alleluia!

He has poured out his love. Alleluia!

PRAISE

Come, Holy Spirit, creator, and renew the earth:

Holy Spirit, come upon us.

Come, Holy Spirit, counsellor,

and touch our lips that we may proclaim your word:

Holy Spirit, come upon us.

Come, Holy Spirit, power from on high;

make us agents of peace and ministers of wholeness:

Holy Spirit, come upon us.

Come, Holy Spirit, breath of God, give life to the dry bones
around us, and make us a living people, holy and free:

Holy Spirit, come upon us.

Come, Holy Spirit, wisdom and truth; strengthen us to be
bold in the faith:

Holy Spirit, come upon us.

Alleluia! Amen!

PERSONAL REFLECTION

In your own words ask God to be with you in this time of prayer...

Then take a few moments to reflect on your life in the last few days, and in your own words speak to God about it, asking him to amend what is wrong, and to affirm what is good.

Then say:

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit:
Father, have mercy.

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart:
Christ, have mercy.

You make one by your love the torn and divided:
Spirit, have mercy.

Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father,
ignite in us your holy fire;
strengthen your children with the gift of faith,
revive your Church, with the breath of love,
and renew the face of the earth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

READINGS

Read: GENESIS 11.1 – 9

The story of the Tower of Babel presents us with a primitive picture of God, motivated by all-too-human responses to threats to his power and authority. The languages of the nations are confused and the peoples are divided.

RESPONSE

An Invocation of the Holy Spirit used by the Church since ancient times.

Come, Holy Spirit, from heaven shine forth with your glorious light!

**Come, Holy Spirit,
from heaven shine forth with your glorious light!**

Come, Father of the poor; come generous Spirit.

**Come, Holy Spirit,
from heaven shine forth with your glorious light!**

Come, light of our hearts; come, source of life.

**Come, Holy Spirit,
from heaven shine forth with your glorious light!**

Come with your sevenfold gifts; kindle in our hearts the flame of your love.

**Come, Holy Spirit,
from heaven shine forth with your glorious light!**

Wash away our sin, send rain upon our dry ground, heal our wounded souls.

**Come, Holy Spirit,
from heaven shine forth with your glorious light!**

Read: ACTS 2.1 – 21

By the outpouring of the Spirit, the confusions of different languages are overcome, and a unity of purpose among the peoples made possible. The gift of the Spirit had been foretold by many of the prophets, notably Ezekiel, who said that God would give his people a new heart and a new spirit, putting his Spirit within them (Ezekiel 36.26-7). At the Last Supper, Jesus said that this prophecy would be fulfilled after the resurrection.

HYMN

**Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire;
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.**

**Thy blessed unction from above
Is comfort, life, and fire of love;
Enable with perpetual light
The dullness of our blinded sight.**

**Anoint and cheer our soiled face
With the abundance of thy grace:
Keep far our foes, give peace at home;
Where thou art guide no ill can come.**

**Teach us to know the Father, Son,
And thee, of both, to be but one;
That through the ages all along
This may be our endless song:**

**Praise to thy eternal merit,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

Read: JOHN 20.19 – 23

REFLECTION : *The Bonfire of Sin*

One of my earliest memories is of a bonfire. It was in Oakwood Park, near where we lived in Southgate, north London. I must have been about four at the time because it was part of the celebrations to mark the end of the War. It was huge – in my mind as big as house! – and it had an opening in one side into which the man who lit it had to walk. My Dad carried me on his shoulders so that I could see. As it was lit from the inside, it was a little while before we saw the

flames, and when they came it was straight out of the top. I don't remember thinking any more about the man who lit it; I guess he got out in time! Soon the whole thing was burning furiously with huge flames! It was exciting, and I have loved bonfires ever since. But at the end there was only a huge pile of ashes. The 'house' had been destroyed.

A visitor from Mars might think it a little odd celebrating peace with something so destructive – and he might also find it a bit odd that a I get so much pleasure out of ordinary bonfires. But maybe, we could convince him that its not so odd. Bonfires burn up waste, trash, rubbish; the stuff we no longer want to carry around. At a deep level, perhaps, in Oakwood Park we were burning up the wrongs of war – the enmity, the violence, the brutality, the black market, the evil desires – to give us a fresh start. Fire is not only destructive; fire is purifying.

Fire is also exciting. Somehow the vigour of the flames communicates itself to us, not only warming us, but making us more lively. We talk of those who are excited as being 'lit up', and of those who are passionate as being 'on fire'. Fire is empowering.

When Luke tells the story of Pentecost, fire is one the images he uses to convey the reality of the event: 'Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.' (*Acts* 2.3) The fire of God was there in that upper room, purifying and empowering, burning away all the rubbish in the disciples' lives, all that prevented them from responding to Jesus' call to follow him, and setting them on fire with passion to continue his work in the world.

Purifying, empowering: this is forgiveness. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus tells us that as soon as we repent, as soon as we really turn to God, he comes running towards us in forgiveness. Easter is the sign that the story of the Prodigal Son is true; that God's

forgiveness is for all who turn to him. Pentecost, says Geoffrey Preston, is the day 'when Easter comes out and goes public. It is the day when Easter breaks out from behind closed doors, where the disciples are hiding in their fear, and takes to the streets.' They were forgiven: purified and empowered! Pentecost was the bonfire of sin.

This is different to the way we usually think of forgiveness. 'So often our image of forgiveness is watery. We think of the blotting out of sins, or the wiping clean of the slate.' And while this is true, it is only part of the truth: 'the image of forgiveness as fire is more significant. If sin is blotted out, its record erased, its slate wiped clean, it is only too likely that the writing tablet will be written on again. The house swept and polished is a standing invitation to a squat by seven spirits more wicked than the one we have got rid of!' (*Geoffrey Preston, Hallowing the Time*) But if sin is burned up in the Pentecostal fire then not only are our sins turned to ashes, we are lit up by the flames, made lively, set on fire for Christ. The new thing that comes into our lives deals with what is old and dead, and also makes us new people.

What would it be like to be new men and women in Jesus through his Holy Spirit? The New Testament gives an ample answer. It talks about a whole new relationship with God in which his commandments are not burdensome, but easy to bear. Living the Christian life is no longer the dull slog of duty performed we can so easily find it to be, but a joy and delight:

Come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden
and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you
and learn from me.... My yoke is easy to bear, and
my burden is light.

MATTHEW 11.29-30

Isn't this what we all want? Too many Christians fail to realise that the gift is ours already; we received it at our baptism. The water poured over us is not just about making us clean; it also a sign of God pouring his Holy Spirit on us; drenching us with his fire. If this gift seems to have passed us by, we must risk coming closer to the fire. And this will probably mean looking again at our repentance, and asking ourselves honestly: How real is it?

Two pictures may help us. Jonah went a day's journey across Nineveh crying, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed.' And the people believed him and repented. Jesus came into Galilee saying, 'The Kingdom of God is upon you; repent and believe the gospel.' And the people followed him. Are we like the people of Nineveh? Do we repent because we fear we have been found out and disaster threatens? Or are we like the people of Galilee? Do we repent because it is the only way to deep fellowship with God? And do we desire that fellowship because we want God for himself only, simply because he is goodness and love?

Long before Christianity is any kind of ethical requirement, long before it is a matter of morals and behaviour and rewards, it is simply a response to what is good and true. But this is where we come near to the fire. Goodness and truth, like the fire burn away all the rubbish in our lives: the false motives, the bent devices, the wrong desires; the seeds of evil in our lives. God makes a bonfire of all the trash which prevents us from responding fully to Jesus' call to follow him. But goodness and truth also warm our hearts. God sets us on fire with passion to continue his work in the world. The Pentecost experience can be ours. It requires nothing except a change of heart.

And what is a change of heart? It is like falling in love. It is, as the psalmist says, deep calling to deep (*Psalms 42.7*); we know we have no choice but to respond, and their fire joins with ours, and there is a new creation.

Pause and reflect.

PRAISE

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mould me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me!

LITANY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Before praying this Litany, offer your own prayers to God.

We pray for God to fill us with his Spirit, saying
Lord, come to bless us
and fill us with your Spirit.

Generous God,
I thank you for the *power* of your Holy Spirit.
I ask that we may be strengthened to serve you better.
Lord, come to bless us
and fill us with your Spirit.

I thank you for the *wisdom* of your Holy Spirit.
I ask you to help us to understand better your will for us.
Lord, come to bless us
and fill us with your Spirit.

I thank you for the *peace* of your Holy Spirit.
I ask you to keep us confident of your love wherever you call
us.
Lord, come to bless us
and fill us with your Spirit.

I thank you for the *healing* of your Holy Spirit.

I ask you to bring reconciliation and wholeness where there is division, sickness and sorrow.

Lord, come to bless us

and fill us with your Spirit.

I thank you for the *gifts* of your Holy Spirit.

I ask you to equip us for the work which you have given us.

Lord, come to bless us

and fill us with your Spirit.

I thank you for the *fruit* of your Holy Spirit.

I ask you to reveal in our lives the love of Jesus.

Lord, come to bless us

and fill us with your Spirit.

I thank you for the breath of your Holy Spirit given on Easter Day and poured out on all at Pentecost.

I ask you to keep the whole Church, living and departed, in the joy of eternal life.

Lord, come to bless us

and fill us with your Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Our Father...

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, now and for ever.
Amen.