

DESMOND O'DONNELL - REFLECTIONS ON THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR PENTECOST SUNDAY

In classical Greek the word for spirit was *pneuma*, meaning the wind or breath or life. It was also used to describe the spirit of joy among people or the spirit of a country. Because *pneuma* was deep, not controllable or predictable, the Greeks associated it vaguely with their gods, but not in any personal sense.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for spirit was *ruah*. It was also another word for breath, for the wind and for the life principle. Authors spoke of spirit as the centre of emotions, for example the spirit of joy or sadness, of courage or freedom and even of a desire for God. Genesis describes how God's breath or spirit in the form of a wind, blew before the creation of the world. The divine spirit was later given by the laying on of hands as when Moses laid his hands on Joshua.

In the New Testament the Spirit of God is revealed as a person. During his Last Supper, Jesus alarmed his disciples by saying that he was leaving them so that a deeper experience than his physical presence would come to them. 'It is to your advantage that I go away,' he said. He continued, 'For if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you.' This advocate, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love, was central to the life of Jesus and is central to our lives now.

Before you listen to God's word, ask the Holy Spirit to help you hear about his role in Jesus' life and in yours.

The Holy Spirit

*My Holy Spirit came upon Mary, and my power overshadowed her so that her Son would be called my Son.
ref: Lk 1:35*

I filled my Son with my Spirit before his birth so that he would be great in my sight. ref: Lk 1:15

In the presence of the Spirit at the Jordan I identified my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. ref: Mk 1:9-11

The Spirit then led my Son into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ref: Mt 4:1

Sent by my Son, the Holy Spirit testifies to him and enables you to testify to him also. ref: Jn 16:26-27

By this you know my Spirit when you confess that my Son has come from me in the flesh. ref: 1 Jn 4:2

*You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. Since my Spirit dwells in you, you belong to Christ; he is in you.
ref: Rom 8:9-10*

When you pray 'Abba, Father', my Holy Spirit bears witness with your spirit that you are my child, my heir and a joint heir with my Son. ref: Rom 8:15-17

Until relatively recently, Western Christians paid inadequate attention to the Holy Spirit. Of course in the Acts of the Apostles there were baptised people who could say, "We did not even know that there is a Holy Spirit.' And we read of those first Christians who 'were all astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit should be poured out on the pagans too'.

The Holy Spirit did not follow their narrow expectations. With great care, and in very limited human language, we can say that the Holy Spirit is the love of the Father and the Son for each other in a person.

Experiencing God's love and then passing this love to others, is a sure manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The author of Ephesians tells us that another great measure of how we have accepted the Spirit of love is our willingness to proclaim God's message to others. And we are reminded that the opposites of love, such as falsehood, anger, stealing and evil talk, grieve the Holy Spirit with whose seal we are marked. He also reminds us that the Spirit wants us to take care in using only words that lovingly give grace and build others up. We love people most when we invite them to experience the fullness of God's love.

The Holy Spirit is not only someone to be prayed to but a life of love to be lived. In Galatians, Paul advises us to 'live by the Spirit' and to 'be guided by the Spirit'.

Now listen carefully to God speaking to you about living this new life, given to you and sustained in you by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of Love

As I promised through the prophets, I am pouring out my Spirit upon all flesh. ref: Acts 2:17

This Holy Spirit poured my love into your heart at your baptism. ref: Rom 5:3

If you love others, I abide in you and you abide in me, because I have given you my Spirit. ref: 1 Jn 4:12-13

If you are reviled for the name of my Son, you are blessed because the spirit of glory, my Spirit, is resting on you. ref: 1 Pet 4:14

My Spirit speaks through you when you proclaim my message, even in the face of opposition. ref: Mt 10:19-20

Speak only what is useful for building up. Let no evil talk come out of your mouth to grieve the Holy Spirit. Always be sure that your words are giving grace to those who hear you. ref: Eph 4:29

Hold to the sound teaching you have received with the help of the Holy Spirit living in you. Guard this good treasure entrusted to you. ref: 2 Tim 1:13

I have given you my Spirit as a guarantee that your mortality will one day be swallowed up in life. ref: 2 Cor 5:4-5

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *YHWH* is used for God. In the New Testament, the Greek translation of this word is *kyrios*. In our English Bible this word becomes Lord. Jesus is also called Lord, and likewise the Holy Spirit is Lord. In second Corinthians we read that "The Lord is the Spirit." Thus, the divine name is used of all three persons.

Yet a different activity is ascribed to each member of the Trinity. The notion of power is attributed to the Holy Spirit, as when Mary is told that the power of the Most High will overshadow her. Similarly in Luke, Jesus told the apostles not to begin their ministry until they were clothed with power from the Holy Spirit, whom he promised to send them.

Paul spoke about a variety of gifts for service in the church but always from the same Spirit. There are apostles and prophets, evangelists and pastors, teachers, healers and others. He says that when each one is working well, it builds up the church in love. He asked his listeners to be eager for spiritual gifts.

Then there are gifts that are essential to every Christian life, the first one being love, then guidance, enrichment of our spiritual poverty, freedom from the captivity of sin and clarity for our spiritual blindness. As Jesus began his ministry in the synagogue, he tells us that these gifts come from the Holy Spirit. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit in its nine manifestations.

Now gently receive God's word to you about the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life. (See newsletter)