

**The Holy Spirit**  
Whitsunday (Pentecost)  
(From the Epistle: *St. James i. 22*)

*And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost...* (Acts 2:4a) (From the Epistle)

*...walk in the Spirit...* (Gal. 5:16a)

*...you were dead...when you followed...the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient* (from Eph. 2:1, 2 NIV)

We live in an age curiously “under the influence”. I say “curiously” because I think it is also an age that prides itself in its sophistication, accomplishment, and independence. We fancy ourselves dilettantes who can take or leave whatever we wish in this world of virtually unlimited choices. None need master us, after all. If we don’t like it, we click the mouse, change the channel, or just turn off the machine. Or we drive down the strip to the next restaurant. Or we stroll a bit further in the Mall. We hover comfortably out of the reach of controversy and commitment. We create our own little designer-universes, customized and personalized to our own tastes, whose boundaries we have carefully determined, so that the sacred confines of our personal “space” aren’t violated.

But all of this, according to inferences drawn from Scripture, is merely grand illusion. One is reminded of Bob Dylan’s grim lyrics: “You’ve gotta serve *somebody*; it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you’ve gotta serve *somebody*!” We are ultimately “under the influence”, whether we like it or not, of one of two controlling powers, whether it be *the Holy Ghost*, as sent God first to the Church at Pentecost, and subsequently to all baptized believers (Acts 2:38b), or *the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient* which belongs to ruler of *the kingdom of the air*. No one is exempted. This is reality, plain and simple, and its implications are huge.

Our times are characterized, actually, not by our cavalier detachment from controlling forces, as is our conceit, but by the sheer number of things that dominate us. They range from the basest, in the form of drugs and alcohol, to the refinements of the advanced technologies that occupy our fancy while keeping us strangely chained to them. Paradoxically, these things come to our lives under the guise of providing liberty. The more of them we use, the freer we suppose we are. Such is the power and genius of deception.

But on the day of Pentecost, or Whitsunday, there arrived from heaven for a small band of believers a Holy Influence in the form of the Third Person of the Trinity, the Spirit of God! Today’s Epistle describes this remarkable event. It was the fulfillment of promises Jesus Himself had made to His disciples only weeks before (see today’s Gospel). So powerful was its effect that it brought unprecedented change to the lives of those who were subject to it. They became

men and women on fire for Christ, filled with conviction, endowed with holy boldness, a change not limited merely to the immediate aftermath of this experience, but one that lasted for a lifetime, giving rise to extraordinary accomplishments. Moreover, this same power became the legacy of the entire Church throughout its history. It is the certifying factor that marks true conversion (Rom. 8:9). It is the invisible seal of God's ownership (Eph. 1:13b). Just as cars are powered by gas, or equipment by electricity, it is the energizing factor that makes the Christian Church into something far greater than a mere institution but a living Body in which God Himself dwells *through the Spirit* (Eph. 2:22b).

Consider the implications of being "under the influence", as it were, of God's Holy Spirit. He is a Person, not a thing. He is not a concept, a metaphysical idea, a notion, a sentiment, a state of mind. In saying that the Spirit of God is a Person, we are saying that He has His own mind and will. His actions within us are independent from us, in that they arise from a Source outside of us. When we submit to His power, we are becoming willing instruments of His own particular designs and intentions. When we are owned by Christ's Spirit, we have become, as it were, like customized gloves that finally have been filled by the Hand that was intended for them! It is the complete opposite of "possession", when human beings become slaves to wicked forces that enter them to enslave and abuse them (as in several Gospel accounts). Christ's Spirit leads to liberty and fulfillment. A life lived "in the Spirit" will always be a life characterized by the supernatural presence of God with all of the attendant marvels associated with it.

Like any relationship between persons, however, there is extraordinary responsibility on both sides. His part of the engagement is guaranteed. He, after all, is always true, always faithful, and never changing. He will never default in His duties to the arrangement. It is *our* side where the matter becomes touchy... very touchy, indeed. How often is the house that we provide Him to dwell in --our hearts, bodies, souls-- defiled and dirty, filled with trash, unkempt and disorderly, a virtual slum, rather than a fit home --a temple! (1 Cor. 6:19)-- for One who is called *Holy*? How often must He compete for our attention with the myriad contenders for it that we invite in, whether our entertainments, our favorite modes of self-indulgence, our careless partaking of all that the devil provides in such abundance to frustrate the work of God in our lives? Have you ever had doves at your window feeder? How easily are these gentle, timid birds startled and frightened off! And how easy is the Heavenly Dove abused by the coarseness of our handling of Him.

God's Spirit is both His gift to the individual believer, and to the Church. He is the precious possession of each of us, but also of all of us corporately. *[G]rieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption* wrote the Apostle to the gathered Church (Eph. 4:30). In other words: "Let us not sadden Him with our conflicts, our divisions, our unchristian rejection of each other." What are families like that are always marked by argument and

fighting? They are impossible places to be. They can be worse than prisons. No one wants to be near them. Anyone who can escape them does so out of desperation.

In short, in order to be willing partners with the Third Person of the Trinity, sent from heaven to inhabit our hearts individually, and the Church, collectively, we must supremely, and above all things, behave ourselves. We must order our own lives appropriately, so that He will be at home in each of our hearts always, wherever we may take Him, or wherever He may lead us. But we must also do our best to determinedly maintain order within the Church, so that He will abide always with us, and never be forced to withdraw Himself from that which He now also calls His *temple* (1 Cor. 3:16).

As we celebrate the arrival to redeemed humanity of God's Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, let us consider once again Who He is, and *who we must be*, in order to prepare ourselves for His coming both to our own lives and our own churches. This is surely always His desire and intention, in any day, and at any time.

Let us pray:

*Grant, we beseech thee, merciful God: that thy Church, being gathered together in unity by thy Holy Spirit; may manifest thy power among all peoples, to the glory of thy Name. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.*