

# What can I do TODAY to grow in my own Catholic Faith?

Where am I on my own spiritual journey?  
Does the Holy Spirit really know me personally?

Let us ask ourselves now, at this Pentecost Vigil, who or what is the Holy Spirit?

How can we recognize him?

How do we go to him and how does he come to us? What does he do?



**In speaking of the “New Pentecost,”  
Pope John Paul II described it as  
“a grace directed to sanctify the Church, to renew in her  
the taste for prayer and to rediscover with the Holy Spirit  
the sense of thankfulness, of joyful praise, of confident  
intercession and to be converted into  
a new fountain of evangelization.”**

# **PRAYER VIGIL AND MEETING, SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST**

## **MEETING WITH THE ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS AND NEW COMMUNITIES**

### **HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI**

St. Peter's Square Saturday, 3 June 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

You have come to St Peter's Square this evening in really large numbers to take part in the Pentecost Vigil. I warmly thank you. You belong to different peoples and cultures and represent here all the members of the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, spiritually gathered round the Successor of Peter to proclaim the joy of believing in Jesus Christ and to renew the commitment to be faithful disciples in our time.

I thank you for your participation and address my cordial greeting to each one of you. My affectionate thoughts go in the first place to the Cardinals, to my venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood and to the men and women Religious.

I greet those in charge of your numerous Ecclesial Associations who show how alive the Holy Spirit's action is among the People of God. I greet the organizers of this extraordinary event, and especially those who work at the Pontifical Council for the Laity with Bishop Josef Clemens, the Secretary, and Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko, the President, to whom I am also grateful for his cordial words at the beginning of the Vespers Liturgy.

A similar meeting that took place in this same Square on 30 May 1998 with beloved Pope John Paul II springs to mind. A great evangelizer of our time, he accompanied and guided you throughout his Pontificate.

He described your Associations and Communities on many occasions as "providential", especially because the Sanctifying Spirit makes use of them to reawaken faith in so many Christian hearts and to reveal to them the vocation they have received with Baptism. He also helps them to be witnesses of hope filled with that fire of love which is bestowed upon us precisely by the Holy Spirit.

Let us ask ourselves now, at this Pentecost Vigil, who or what is the Holy Spirit? How can we recognize him? How do we go to him and how does he come to us? What does he do?

The Church's great Pentecostal hymn with which we began Vespers: "Veni, Creator Spiritus... Come, Holy Spirit" gives us a first answer. Here the hymn refers to the first verses of the Bible that describe the creation of the universe with recourse to images.

The Bible says first of all that the Spirit of God was moving over the chaos, over the waters of the abyss.

The world in which we live is the work of the Creator Spirit. Pentecost is not only the origin of the Church and thus in a special way her feast; Pentecost is also a feast of creation. The world does not exist by itself; it is brought into being by the creative Spirit of God, by the creative Word of God.

For this reason Pentecost also mirrors God's wisdom. In its breadth and in the omni-comprehensive logic of its laws, God's wisdom permits us to glimpse something of his Creator Spirit. It elicits reverential awe.

Those very people who, as Christians, believe in the Creator Spirit become aware of the fact that we cannot use and abuse the world and matter merely as material for our actions and desires; that we must consider creation a gift that has not been given to us to be destroyed, but to become God's garden, hence, a garden for men and women.

In the face of the many forms of abuse of the earth that we see today, let us listen, as it were, to the groaning of creation of which St Paul speaks (Rom 8: 22); let us begin by understanding the Apostle's words, that creation waits with impatience for the revelation that we are children of God, to be set free from bondage and obtain his splendour.

Dear friends, we want to be these children of God for whom creation is waiting, and we can become them because the Lord has made us such in Baptism. Yes, creation and history - they are waiting for us, for men and women who are truly children of God and behave as such.

If we look at history, we see that creation prospered around monasteries, just as with the reawakening of God's Spirit in human hearts the brightness of the Creator Spirit has also been restored to the earth - a splendour that has been clouded and at times even extinguished by the barbarity of the human mania for power.

Moreover, the same thing happened once again around Francis of Assisi - it has happened everywhere as God's Spirit penetrates souls, this Spirit whom our hymn describes as light, love and strength.

Thus, we have discovered an initial answer to the question as to what the Holy Spirit is, what he does and how we can recognize him. He comes to meet us through creation and its beauty.

However, in the course of human history, a thick layer of dirt has covered God's good creation, which makes it difficult if not impossible to perceive in it the Creator's reflection, although the knowledge of the Creator's existence is reawakened within us ever anew, as it were, spontaneously, at the sight of a sunset over the sea, on an excursion to the mountains or before a flower that has just bloomed.

But the Creator Spirit comes to our aid. He has entered history and speaks to us in a new way. In Jesus Christ, God himself was made man and allowed us, so to speak, to cast a glance at the intimacy of God himself.

And there we see something totally unexpected: in God, an "I" and a "You" exist. The mysterious God is not infinite loneliness, he is an event of love. If by gazing at creation we think we can glimpse the Creator Spirit, God himself, rather like creative mathematics, like a force that shapes the laws of the world and their order, but then, even, also like beauty - now we come to realize: the Creator Spirit has a heart. He is Love.

The Son who speaks to the Father exists and they are both one in the Spirit, who constitutes, so to speak, the atmosphere of giving and loving which makes them one God. This unity of love which is God, is a unity far more sublime than the unity of a last indivisible particle could be. The Triune God himself is the one and only God.

Through Jesus let us as it were cast a glance at God in his intimacy. John, in his Gospel, expressed it like this: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (Jn 1: 18).

Yet Jesus did not only let us see into God's intimacy; with him, God also emerged, as it were, from his intimacy and came to meet us. This happened especially in his life, passion, death and Resurrection; in his words.

Jesus, however is not content with coming to meet us. He wants more. He wants unification. This is the meaning of the images of the banquet and the wedding.

Not only must we know something about him, but through him we must be drawn to God. For this reason he had to die and be raised, since he is now no longer to be found in any specific place, but his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, emanates from him and enters our hearts, thereby uniting us with Jesus himself and with the Father, the Triune God.

Pentecost is this: Jesus, and through him God himself, actually comes to us and draws us to himself. "He sends forth the Holy Spirit" - this is what Scripture says. What effect does this have?

I would like first of all to pick out two aspects: the Holy Spirit, through whom God comes to us, brings us life and freedom. Let us look at both these things a little more closely.

"I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly", Jesus says in the Gospel of John (10: 10). Life and freedom: these are the things for which we all yearn. But what is this - where and how do we find "life"?

I think that the vast majority of human beings spontaneously have the same concept of life as the Prodigal Son of the Gospel. He had his share of the patrimony given to him and then felt free; in the end, what he wanted was to live no longer burdened by the duties of home, but just to live. He wanted everything that life can offer. He wanted to enjoy it to the full - living, only living, immersed in life's abundance, missing none of all the valuable things it can offer.

In the end he found himself caring for pigs and even envying those animals - his life had become so empty and so useless. And his freedom was also proving useless.

When all that people want from life is to take possession of it, it becomes ever emptier and poorer; it is easy to end up seeking refuge in drugs, in the great deception. And doubts surface as to whether, in the end, life is truly a good.

No, we do not find life in this way. Jesus' words about life in abundance are found in the Good Shepherd discourse. His words are set in a double context.

Concerning the shepherd, Jesus tells us that he lays down his life. "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (cf. Jn 10: 18). It is only in giving life that it is found; life is not found by seeking to possess it. This is what we must learn from Christ; and the Holy Spirit teaches us that it is a pure gift, that it is God's gift of himself. The more one gives one's life for others, for goodness itself, the more abundantly the river of life flows.

Secondly, the Lord tells us that life unfolds in walking with the Shepherd who is familiar with the pasture - the places where the sources of life flow.

We find life in communion with the One who is life in person - in communion with the living God, a communion into which we are introduced by the Holy Spirit, who is called in the hymn of Vespers "fons vivus", a living source.

The pasture where the sources of life flow is the Word of God as we find it in Scripture, in the faith of the Church. The pasture is God himself who we learn to recognize in the communion of faith through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dear friends, the Movements were born precisely of the thirst for true life; they are Movements for life in every sense.

Where the true source of life no longer flows, where people only appropriate life instead of giving it, wherever people are ready to dispose of unborn life because it seems to take up room in their own lives, it is there that the life of others is most at risk. If we want to protect life, then we must above all rediscover the source of life; then life itself must re-emerge in its full beauty and sublimeness; then we must let ourselves be enlivened by the Holy Spirit, the creative source of life.

The theme of freedom has just been mentioned. The Prodigal Son's departure is linked precisely with the themes of life and freedom. He wanted life and therefore desired to be totally liberated. Being free, in this perspective, means being able to do whatever I like, not being bound to accept any criterion other than and over and above myself. It means following my own desires and my own will alone.

Those who live like this very soon clash with others who want to live the same way. The inevitable consequence of this selfish concept of freedom is violence and the mutual destruction of freedom and life.

Sacred Scripture, on the other hand, connects the concept of freedom with that of sonship. St Paul says: "You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship", through which we cry, "'Abba! Father!'" (Rom 8: 15). What does this mean?

St Paul presupposes the social system of the ancient world in which slaves existed. They owned nothing, so they could not be involved in the proper development of things.

Co-respectively, there were sons who were also heirs and were therefore concerned with the preservation and good administration of their property or the preservation of the State. Since they were free, they also had responsibility.

Leaving aside the sociological background of that time, the principle still holds true: freedom and responsibility go hand in hand. True freedom is demonstrated in responsibility, in a way of behaving in which one takes upon oneself a shared responsibility for the world, for oneself and for others.

The son, to whom things belong and who, consequently, does not let them be destroyed, is free. All the worldly responsibilities of which we have spoken are nevertheless partial responsibilities for a specific area, a specific State, etc.

The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, makes us sons and daughters of God. He involves us in the same responsibility that God has for his world, for the whole of humanity. He teaches us to look at the world, others and ourselves with God's eyes. We do not do good as slaves who are not free to act otherwise, but we do it because we are personally responsible for the world; because we love truth and goodness, because we love God himself and therefore, also his creatures. This is the true freedom to which the Holy Spirit wants to lead us.

The Ecclesial Movements want to and must be schools of freedom, of this true freedom. Let us learn in them this true freedom, not the freedom of slaves that aims to cut itself a slice of the cake that belongs to everyone even if this means that some do not get any. We want the true, great freedom, the freedom of heirs, the freedom of children of God. In this world, so full of fictitious forms of freedom that destroy the environment and the human being, let us learn true freedom by the power of the Holy Spirit; to build the school of freedom; to show others by our lives that we are free and how beautiful it is to be truly free with the true freedom of God's children.

The Holy Spirit, in giving life and freedom, also gives unity. These are three gifts that are inseparable from one another. I have already gone on too long; but let me say a brief word about unity. To understand it, we might find a sentence useful which at first seems rather to distance us from it. Jesus said to Nicodemus, who came to him with his questions by night: "The wind blows where it wills" (Jn 3: 8). But the Spirit's will is not arbitrary. It is the will of truth and goodness.

Therefore, he does not blow from anywhere, now from one place and then from another; his breath is not wasted but brings us together because the truth unites and love unites.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Spirit who unites the Father with the Son in Love, which in the one God he gives and receives. He unites us so closely that St Paul once said: "You are all one in Jesus Christ" (Gal 3: 28).

With his breath, the Holy Spirit impels us towards Christ. The Holy Spirit acts corporeally; he does not only act subjectively or "spiritually". The Risen Christ said to his disciples, who supposed that they were seeing only a "spirit": "It is I myself; touch me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have" (cf. Lk 24: 39).



This applies for the Risen Christ in every period of history. The Risen Christ is not a ghost, he is not merely a spirit, a thought, only an idea. He has remained incarnate - it is the Risen One who took on our flesh - and always continues to build his Body, making us his Body. The Spirit breathes where he wills, and his will is unity embodied, a unity that encounters the world and transforms it.

In his Letter to the Ephesians, St Paul tell us that this Body of Christ, which is the Church, has joints (cf. 4: 16) and even names them: they are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (cf. 4: 12). In his gifts, the Spirit is multifaceted - we see it here. If we look at history, if we look at this assembly here in St Peter's Square, then we realize that he inspires ever new gifts; we see how different are the bodies that he creates and how he works bodily ever anew.

But in him multiplicity and unity go hand in hand. He breathes where he wills. He does so unexpectedly, in unexpected places and in ways previously unheard of. And with what diversity and corporality does he do so! And it is precisely here that diversity and unity are inseparable. He wants your diversity and he wants you for the one body, in union with the permanent orders - the joints - of the Church, with the successors of the Apostles and with the Successor of St Peter.

He does not lessen our efforts to learn the way of relating to one another; but he also shows us that he works with a view to the one body and in the unity of the one body. It is precisely in this way that unity obtains its strength and beauty.

May you take part in the edification of the one body! Pastors must be careful not to extinguish the Spirit (cf. I Thes 5: 19) and you will not cease to bring your gifts to the entire community.

Once again, the Spirit blows where he wills. But his will is unity. He leads us towards Christ through his Body.

"From Christ", St Paul tells us, "the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph 4: 16).

The Holy Spirit desires unity, he desires totality. Therefore, his presence is finally shown above all in missionary zeal.

Anyone who has come across something true, beautiful and good in his life - the one true treasure, the precious pearl - hastens to share it everywhere, in the family and at work, in all the contexts of his life.

He does so without any fear, because he knows he has received adoption as a son; without any presumption, for it is all a gift; without discouragement, for God's Spirit precedes his action in people's "hearts" and as a seed in the most diverse cultures and religions. He does so without restraint, for he bears a piece of good news which is for all people and for all the peoples opening doors to Christ. .

Dear friends,

I ask you to collaborate even more, very much more, in the Pope's universal apostolic ministry,

This is the Church's best service for men and women and especially for the poor, so that the person's life, a fairer order in society and peaceful coexistence among the nations may find in Christ the cornerstone on which to build the genuine civilization, the civilization of love.

The Holy Spirit gives believers a superior vision of the world, of life, of history, and makes them custodians of the hope that never disappoints.

Let us pray to God the Father, therefore, through Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the grace of the Holy Spirit, so that the celebration of the Solemnity of Pentecost may be like an ardent flame and a blustering wind for Christian life and for the mission of the whole Church.



I place the intentions of your Movements and Communities  
in the heart of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, present in the Upper Room  
together with the Apostles; may she be the one who implores God to grant them.

Upon all of you I invoke an outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit,  
so that in our time too, we may have the experience of a renewed Pentecost.  
Amen!

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Are you ready to step forward, as an adult, and continue your faith Journey?  
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