

## Pentecost, Year C

Today's entrance antiphon sets the mood for the Mass. We are reminded that 'the Spirit of the Lord fills the whole world'. The Responsorial Psalm has the same theme: 'the earth is full of God's riches'.

It is so important that we keep reminding ourselves of this truth that we acclaim in every Mass: 'heaven and earth are filled with your glory'. It is impossible to read a newspaper or watch the television news without a sickening reminder that the face of the earth can be very ugly. To the extent that our own personal lives are also disturbed (and to some extent this can be true of all of us), we can easily get the impression that everything is falling apart. Yet we have just prayed (Entrance Antiphon): 'The Spirit of the Lord holds all things together'.

This is the theme of a poem of the Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins ('God's grandeur').

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.  
And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings'.

Whatever ugliness there is in our world, it is on the surface. The real power and the real energy and the real life that is pulsing through the universe is the power and energy of love: the love of God's Holy Spirit. The world is like a huge room on which the sun of God's love is always shining. When we sin we pull down the blind and draw the curtains, thus plunging our lives into darkness - but we do not stop the sun shining. In the dark, we stumble, and we hurt ourselves and one another; we are lost and insecure, and we do ugly things. But today's feast reminds us that the Spirit of God's love is there. Our task is to lift the blind and open the curtains and welcome God's entrance. Hence the prayer we have just prayed as a response to the Psalm: 'Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth'.

The second theme of today's Mass is that God wills to renew the face of the earth through us. In our opening prayer we prayed that the Spirit would 'continue to work in the world through the hearts of all who believe'. We are disciples of Jesus and look at the love which he released in this world! So that he could continue to do it

through us, he sent his own Spirit on the apostles in the form of tongues of fire, and we pray today 'Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love' (Gospel Acclamation).

The account of the first Pentecost tells us that the tongues of fire 'separated and came to rest on the head of each of them' (Acts 2:3). This is still true today. The fire of God's love touches each one of us in a unique way. No two people have the same way of loving; each of us has our own special gift from God.

We are not to compare ourselves with others, vainly thinking we are better or more gifted, or indulging in false humility by thinking we are worse. Jesus loves us as we are, and wants only to fill each one's heart with his prayer and with his love and with his passion for the world which he wants to love. Paul tells us that the 'Spirit of God has made his home' in us (Romans 8:9). Whatever our family and background and circumstances, Jesus' Spirit calls each of us to love with whatever heart and mind and soul and strength we have.

If we do this together, then we are the kind of community in which Jesus takes delight, and we will continue to expand our hearts to be filled by God and to welcome all who feel drawn to the heart of God. If today we earnestly pray: 'Lord, send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth', what we are really praying is that we ourselves will be open to God's love and God's inspiration. This may not remove from us the cross, but we will be astonished at the difference that welcoming God's love and grace will make to the world, and if enough people do it, the face of the earth will indeed be renewed, for God's love is a fire. It purifies, but it gives light and warmth. And whose heart does not long for both?

In case you do not have a missal, the following is a special poem written for today's liturgy (the Sequence). It is a fine reflection on the meaning of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Take some time off and read through the prayer slowly, stopping to reflect on how it might be real for you. I think you'll find it very helpful, as it describes rather beautifully various aspects of the Spirit of Jesus and invites this Spirit to make our hearts like the heart of Jesus.

Holy Spirit, Lord of light,  
from the clear celestial height,  
your pure beaming radiance give.

Come, Father of the poor,  
come with treasures which endure,  
come, light of all that live!

You, of all consolers best,  
you, the soul's delightful guest,  
such refreshing peace bestow.

You in toil are comfort sweet;  
pleasant coolness in the heat;  
solace in the midst of woe.

Light immortal, light divine,  
visit now these hearts of thine  
and our inmost being fill.

If you take your grace away,  
nothing pure in us will stay,  
all our good is turned to ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew;  
on our dryness pour your dew;  
wash the stains of sin away:

Bend the stubborn heart and will;  
melt the frozen; warm the chill;  
guide the steps that go astray.

We pray you, we who evermore  
you confess and you adore,  
with your sevenfold gifts descend:

Give us comfort when we die;  
give us life with you on high;  
give us joys that never end.

The following hymn expresses a profound sentiment of longing:

1. O breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew,  
that I may love what You would love, and do what You would do.
2. O breathe on me Breath of God until my heart is pure,  
until with You I have one will to do and to endure.
3. O breathe on me Breath of God till I am wholly Yours,  
until this earthly part of me glows with Your fiery cause.
4. O breathe on me Breath of God, so shall I never die,  
but live with You the perfect life of Your eternity.