

The Holy Spirit Comes

This Week's Readings at Mass

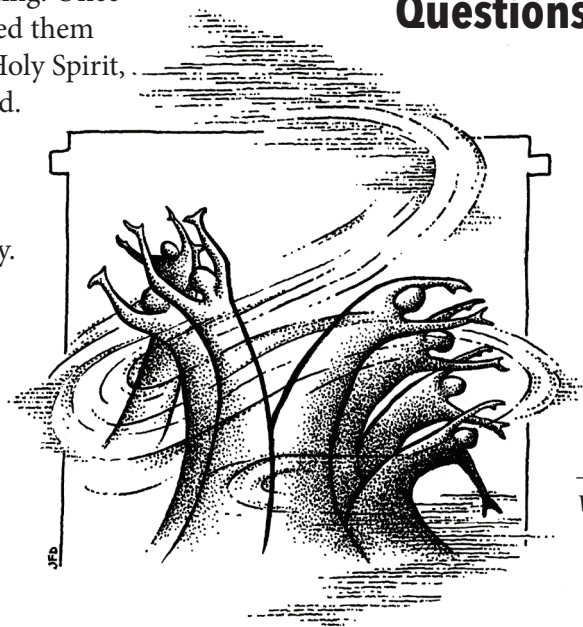
- Acts 2:1-11 • Apostles receive the gift of tongues
- 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13 • One body in Christ
- John 20:19-23 • "Receive the Holy Spirit"

If you ask a group of people how the apostles received the gift of the Holy Spirit, some will say through tongues of fire while others will say that Jesus breathed on them. We get the first image from today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles. The second image comes from John's Gospel. How the apostles historically received the gift of the Spirit is less important than what resulted when the Spirit filled them. In both stories, the apostles changed from a group in hiding, fearful for their lives, to bold and confident proclaimers of God's great works through Jesus.

In the Gospel reading today, Jesus breathed on the apostles just as God breathed life into the first human. Like the readings from John's Gospel that we've heard the last few weeks, Jesus is showing his friends that he is one and the same as God. Just as the first human came alive with God's breath, so the apostles come alive in a new way when they receive the Holy Spirit.

Before the coming of the Spirit, they were a fearful, closed group, hiding out, paralyzed to continue Jesus' ministry of healing and teaching. Once Jesus came to them and offered them his peace and the gift of the Holy Spirit, they immediately transformed. Rejoicing replaced fear, and the willingness to move outward to minister to others replaced their desire for safety.

After Jesus breathed on the disciples, he tells them, "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." This verse is often interpreted as the origin of priests' authority to forgive



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"To each individual the manifestation of the spirit is given for some benefit."

Sheepish Question:
When, lately, have I felt the Spirit prompting me in a way that serves others.

sins, but it applies to all of us. Jesus is pointing out the power we all have in choosing how we respond to hurt. When we forgive others, we not only free them from our anger and resentment, we free ourselves from carrying those emotions. On the other hand, if we retain someone's sins by refusing to forgive them, we are holding ourselves bound by anger, resentment, blame, and hurt. We are just as much the prisoner in the relationship. Our refusal to forgive affects not only the offending person, but us, as well.

Questions of the Week

- 1 When have you had the privileged experience of watching someone else move from fear to courage? How did God/the Holy Spirit play a role in that?
- 2 When have you experienced freedom by being forgiven by someone? When have you been able to free someone else by offering forgiveness?

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