

An Act of the Holy Spirit? I Think So!

Of all the Persons of the Trinity, I'd say, the Holy Spirit is the hardest to define. Most of us can at least begin to describe the other two:

- God, our Father – and/or Mother! – the Creator of heaven and earth, who makes the sun shine and the rain fall.
- God, the Son – who was human like us – our savior, teacher, helper, and friend.

But how would you describe the Holy Spirit to a 5 year-old child? Even Jesus had a hard time with that one: *"The Spirit flows where it chooses,"* he said in John's Gospel and *"you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes."* (3:8)

During the Church's 2000-year history, the Holy Spirit has often been an aggravation to Church leaders: things would often run more smoothly without that "thorn in their side"! In some ways, the 2nd Century movement to a hierarchy-style Church, was an attempt to get rid of that aggravation: sort of putting The Spirit in a box! But it really has never worked... because: *you cannot hold down The Spirit!* As you know, I love the saying:

"You can step on a flower, ...but you *cannot* hold back the spring!"

Sisters and brothers, one of the difficulties with The Holy Spirit is that if we truly pray for the guidance of The Holy Spirit, we are forced to deal with prophets — those outside ourselves as well as the prophetic voice deep in our hearts —and, as history often points out: prophets are often killed rather than listened to.

But surfacing and listening to prophets was the normal process Biblical people employed to understand what God wanted them to do in their lives and societies. Throughout the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures there runs the belief that God always places a handful of especially inspired people in our midst to point us in the direction God wants us to go.

The late theologian Bruce Vawter tells us that prophets are "individuals who are the conscience of the people" and, Scripture scholar Hans Walter Wolf states that prophets are "individuals who supply us with the future implications of our present actions..."

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By and large, we don't want to deal with these individuals – these prophets – because, as Wolf explains: "Authentic prophets, triggered by the Holy Spirit, constantly cause confusion" ... in society and in ourselves.

As Luke describes, it's no accident that at the Pentecost Event, The Spirit's arrival in the upper room where the Disciples were gathered – filled with fear and despair and a sense of failure – is accompanied with *noise, wind, fire ...* all elements which *lift us out of secure environment and throw us into confusion*. It was in the midst of the confusion that the Disciples woke-up – *were filled with the Holy Spirit* – and the rest is ... history and we are here today, 2000 years later!

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A question to ask ourselves on this Pentecost 2015: *'How have we encountered The Holy Spirit in our lives?'*

At first glance we might say: 'I don't think I ever have...'. But, if we look a bit deeper – especially to those experiences we didn't quite have a name for – my bet is it was the work of The Holy Spirit. Some examples:

Let's say you've been in a bad mood for the last year... a lot of confusion and questions – it seems that all you're doing is moving bricks from one pile to another, at work, at home, at night. Then one night, while you're lying awake, tossing and turning in your bed, you hear a bird sing outside... just one bird....

'Why is the bird singing in the night?' you wonder; and then you realize it is *not* the middle of the night anymore... it is the edge of morning. The bird chirps again and something inside of you softens, you take a deep breath for the first time in months and your chest opens up..., you shed a tear, you get a second wind and life seems worth living once again.

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You're estranged from someone you really care about, because of something you said or did or didn't do or something the other person said or did... it doesn't really matter which. The point is you are tired of it, so you start plotting ways to get through: drafting letters, rehearsing phone conversations... only none of them sounds right. You're still holding on to your hurt, your anger, your confusion and it keeps leaking through. Then one day – for no apparent reason – something inside of you says "Now!"

You grab the phone, the person says "Hello," ...and the rest is history. Your heart opens and the right words come out. *A re-union* begins....

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These intimate encounters with The Spirit are very potent, but The Spirit can also work with groups of people small or large. I've seen it happen over and over again: people coming into the room one by one, absolutely set on their own agendas, often fearful and defensive. There's prayer... there's talk ... and, for no *apparent* reason, positions begin to shift: people listen to one another and begin to take one another seriously, become creative together, coming up with ideas that none of them had thought of on their own. It is as if a fresh wind blows through the room and clears everyone's head. Have you ever had that experience?

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A good example: Last year, some of our neighbors had a few issues with the Dorothy Day House. We convened a meeting with the staff of the Dorothy Day House and invited all the neighbors (about 40 people came), along with some folks from Catholic Charities. There was a bit of tension at the beginning and certainly there were a number of conflicting views of things, but eventually a sense of understanding and agreement surfaced: and now: the neighbors and our Parish are more involved in the Ministry there (we'll be hearing more about that soon). Neighbors are bringing over dinners, donating clothes, getting to actually know the residents. In fact, we need to have another meeting soon so that the dialogue continues.

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Look at the negotiations taking place among several nations with Iran. How amazing it would be if those decisions could conclude positively, potentially preventing war and lowering the threat of more nuclear armaments in the world!

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As mentioned in our Easter Homily, some environmental experts are predicting that 2015 could be the year that the global community at large wakes-up to the reality that the human species is destroying Mother Earth and threatening the future of all humanity ... think of Pope Francis' upcoming encyclical (due out in June or July), and the global meeting in Paris held last December ... but the seeds of this realization were planted way back in the 1960s with Rachel Carson's amazing book Silent Spring.

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This weekend tens of thousands of people are gathering at the Cathedral in San Salvador, El Salvador, to celebrate the Beatification of Bishop Oscar Romero – who was assassinated some 30 years ago, while celebrating Mass at a cancer hospital convent; the first Bishop slain at the Altar since Thomas Becket in the 12th Century.

A rather conservative, pious intellectual, no one thought Archbishop Romero would ever become an embodiment of the prophetic Church. But after officiating at the funeral of a young priest who was killed as a result of his commitment to social justice, something changed within Bishop Romero. He was literally reborn, transformed from a timid, conventional cleric to a fearless, outspoken champion of justice.

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Finally, on this Pentecost Sunday – the birthday of the Church – I can't help but reflect on November 1, 2008. Sisters and brothers hurting, sad and, even resentful at the closing of parishes that they loved and cherished... in the midst of the pain and ashes, crossed over to a new beginning and created our All Saints Parish with a deep commitment that our new All Saints Community would be a welcoming home for all people – without exception. And that birthing continues!

This weekend, we celebrate the fruits of that commitment: at our 9 AM Mass on Sunday Deborah Maines, Rob Myers, and Cate Smith will celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation and at our 11:30am Mass, four young members of our Congolese Community will be baptized into the Catholic Church.

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