

Weekly Sunday Readings Reflections

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Pentecost Sunday May 24, 2026

"Receive the Holy Spirit!"

Question of the Week: *How do others see the Light of the Holy Spirit within you?*

- **First Reading: Acts 2: 1-11**

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit

- **Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34**

R: Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

- **Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13**

No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

- **Gospel Reading: John 20:19-23**

Jesus came and stood in their midst

Reading 1: Gift of the Spirit

2:1 "day of Pentecost" The word "Pentecost" is literally "fifty." The festival referred to the Feast of Grain Harvest which was celebrated fifty days after Passover (the Feast of Unleavened Bread). While it was an agricultural feast, it gained an association with the reception of the Law on Mt. Sinai. Although the feast began to lose its agricultural significance in the inter-Testamental period (300 B.C. to 100 A.D.), most scholars believe this connection was finally made after the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. Pentecost was one of three feasts that encouraged pilgrimage.

2:2 "it filled the entire house where they were sitting" Sitting was the position of education. Hence, Luke painted the disciples as students of the Spirit.

2:5 "living in Jerusalem" is a loose term that should not be confused with residency. Luke portrayed the city with a cosmopolitan flavor and as a pilgrimage stop. The crowd

could contain both locals and visitors.

Luke's point was not the composition of the crowd as it was the universal import of the mission and the message.

2:6 "As (there) were these voices" is literally, "As the sound happened." While the sound could have been the noise like the wind or the proclamation of the disciples, the context argued for the later interpretation.

Breathing and life go hand-in-hand. While we might take both for granted, deny our breath and we will panic about life.

To the ancient peoples, breathing was the sign of spirit, a person's life force. In fact, spiritus (Latin), pneuma (Greek), and ruah (Hebrew) all mean breathe and spirit.

When applied to the God, these words mean breeze or wind; many ancient people believed that winds were the result of God's breathe. And, by breathing, God gave life. In Genesis 1:2, God breathed his Spirit upon the waters as a mighty wind and life began.

Weekly Sunday Readings Reflections

Word-Sunday.com

Among Jew, the once agricultural feast of Pentecost [1] now celebrated the reception of God's Law on Mt. Sinai. Luke changed this feast into the reception of the Spirit by Christians. God's breathe filled the house like a mighty wind, and new life began in the followers of Jesus. [2].

Then, flames spread over the followers like a wind driven wild fire. This was a sign for enlightenment (fire in the mind) and passion (fire in the belly) [3]. With insight and motivation, the followers of Jesus spread the Good News to others in ways that were clearly understood [4-6].

As a center for worship on a major feast day, Jerusalem swelled with visitors from all parts of the known world. These visitors (mixed with locals) gathered around and heard the proclamation of God's great acts in their native tongues [7-11].

At the first Christian Pentecost, God breathed his Spirit and changed the followers of Jesus. They were new creatures, for God's very Spirit dwelled within them. With their words proclaiming God's mighty acts, Jesus' followers breathed out God's Spirit on others. And God's People were gathered together.

Q: As the place whether God's Spirit dwells, we are his instruments in the world. What we think and say and do spreads God's life giving breath to others. How do we measure up to this privilege and responsibility?

Psalm: Creator God

Q: When was the last time you felt at one with nature? Did that experience give you pause for praise? Why or why not?

Vacation time will soon be here: A time for travel, a time for sightseeing; a time to unwind and appreciate God's handiwork.

If you do visit a National Park or other natural wonder this summer, consider taking Psalm 104 along for some prayer time. The inspiration of what you see will dovetail with what you pray.

Psalm 104 is a declaration of God's awesome power. Its beginning (104:1-4) and end (104:31-35) praise God for his powerful revelation. Notice the means of revelation not the content was praised; the "winds as messengers" and "fire as ministers," the trembling of the earth and the fire on the mountain spoke to the experience on Mt. Sinai when the nation was formed. These demonstrations of power resulted in the Mosaic covenant and the Law. They also reflected the power YHWH had over creation; notice the image of the heavenly court placed over creation (i.e, "upon the waters"), not within the natural order (as the neighbors of Israel did). God used events of nature for his own ends. These were reasons to bless God throughout life.

104:5-18 presented a desert dweller's notion of creative power. How did the Israelite author know YHWH was God? He controlled the water. After "fixing the earth to its foundations," God separated and channeled the water with the pronouncement of his Word (the divine "roar" and "thunder" in 104:7); compare this verse with Genesis 1:1 when he separated the waters with his breath (translated "mighty wind" in some texts). Whether on the mountain or down the creek, in the lake or down the river, in the bay or in the seas, the water would not move without approval from God. YHWH controlled water for the benefit of his creation. Animals would

Weekly Sunday Readings Reflections

Word-Sunday.com

receive refreshment; humanity would enjoy the fruits of water flow. God's control of water proved he had a place for every creature in nature.

For the Israelite, God also controlled light and darkness. In 104:19-23, God controlled the rhythms of day and night, whether it be in the celestial cycles of the moon and the sun, or in the wake and sleeping patterns of the animal kingdom.

In all, God was to be praised for the order of creation (104:24-26). The author marveled at creation's fullness; all things had a place to live and move. With God, there was blessing and life; without God, there was not only a lack, but a void (104:27-30). Like 104:7, 104:30 closely paralleled Genesis 1:1. God would send his Spirit over the earth and renew it. In Christian eyes, this verse made the psalm perfect for the celebration of Pentecost when God sent his Spirit upon the Apostles and began the creation of a new people, the Church.

The power of God is awe-inspiring. As people who live in modern times, we might not be overwhelmed with the notion that God is God because he controls the flow of water or the cycles of light and dark. We can, however, marvel at the power of God in the billions of galaxies he created. Like the Israelite, we might feel small compared to the presence and power of nature that God created. And, like the Israelite, we view our God as a benevolent Creator. He orders all things for his glory and our welfare.

We are to praise God for his power and love.

Q: Take time this week to consider your place in God's creation. How has God blessed you with the plants and animals that surround you? How has God given you

hope in the flow of day and night, or the cycle of seasons?

Reading 2: Spiritual Gifts

Unity and diversity. Think of the multi-cultural culture we now live in. Not only are we racially and ethnically mixed, we also have many expressions of tradition and language. In the past, such differences would have been kept separated in the ghetto for two generations until there was cultural assimilation. But, with the many media avenues for news, our differences are much more apparent, even threatening.

The image of the Church far outdates our culture, but the tensions we face were real to those in Corinth. There were class and ethnic differences in the community. But, in addition, there were many different behaviors that manifest "spiritual gifts." But, unlike some modern commentators who seek to encourage differences over unity or to suppress differences for the sake of unity, Paul encouraged these "spiritual" behaviors as a sign of God's presence. Prophecy, utterances of wisdom, speaking in tongues, teaching, all were different gifts of the Spirit for the good of the community. Notice, Paul pointed to everyone in the community as a person with a spiritual gift. He implied the use of such gifts should be exercised, not suppressed. But, at the same time, he pointed to the reason the gifts were given: the good of others. Gifts were not to be a sign of self-glorification. No, they were for the glory of God!

Like the Corinthians, we all have gifts to offer for the common good and the praise of God. How we use them, however, determines their effectiveness -- and our intention. Do our gifts unite or divide? Do they show we are

Weekly Sunday Readings Reflections

Word-Sunday.com

one in the Body of Christ? Or, do they reveal divisions that crack the face of the Church?

The Spirit gave us his gifts. Let us use them wisely.

Q: What gifts do you bring to the Church? How can you help to build up the community? How can your gifts and service give praise to God?

Gospel: The Holy Spirit, The Force of Forgiveness

Q: How is God's Spirit different from the Force in Star Wars?

George Lucas has released Star Wars onto video and DVD. Children of all ages can now relive the saga of the most profitable series in movie history. They can root for the Light side of the Force, and boo the Dark Side.

The Holy Spirit found in Christianity does not mirror the dual nature of the impersonal Force. Why? The Holy Spirit brings us love and hope. Love and hope do not have a dark side. And, both love and hope begin with forgiveness.

The Holy Spirit we worship, the Holy Spirit we possess, is the Spirit of divine forgiveness.

Like many other Resurrection stories, John divided this passage into two blocks: appearance of the Risen Lord and the commission of the disciples. For John, the breath of the Spirit was the sign and substance of the commission.

20:19 "evening in that first day of the week" is literally "evening in that day, the first one of the Sabbaths." The use of the plural "Sabbaths" indicates the time frame of a week.

"(Jewish leaders)" is literally "Jews." John used generic language to indicate specific

groups within in the general culture. "Jews" were members of the Jewish leadership. "Greeks" were the non-Jewish populace (not people born in Greece).

The scene in the gospel opened with fear and apprehension on the part of Jesus' followers. John originally wrote "they feared the Jews." Clearly John referred to the Jewish leaders, especially the Pharisees. So the popular translation reflected the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees.

We should also note the relationship between John's community and Jewish synagogues led by Pharisees. By the time John wrote his gospel, Jewish Christians had been excommunicated for their belief in the Messiah. Ostracized and socially persecuted, some Christians reacted in fear, while others boldly proclaimed the gospel. Early Christians needed a sense of stability, a sense of divine peace. Through the words of Jesus, "Peace" was John's prayer for his readers.

With the sight of Jesus, fear turned into great joy. Anxiety turned into relief. Desperation turned into vindication. Most important, a lack of spiritual direction turned into a sense of deep spiritual grounding. The divine presence stood close to them. And with the divine presence came divine peace.

20:23 This is an extremely awkward set of sentences. The sentences are literally "Of whomever you might sent away (their) sins, they have been sent away for them. Of whomever you might hold, they have been held."

The key theological phrase is "they have been sent away;" the verb is in the past tense, indicating the sin had been forgiven before the pronouncement of the Church.

Weekly Sunday Readings Reflections

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On the one hand, Jesus already suffered for that particular sin and all the sins of the world. Hence, the declaration would be a proclamation of the Good News. (The current form of Sacrament of Reconciliation stresses this proclamation. In the sacrament, we are to celebrate God's forgiveness, not our sinfulness.)

On the other hand, the implication of "pre-forgiveness" might lead to presumption on the part of the sinner or a sense of blessed predestination. Obviously the former sense is meant, not the later. God holds everyone responsible for their actions, both of sin and of faith.

Jesus commissioned his followers to partake in his Messianic ministry. At the time of Jesus, Jews believed the Messiah mission at the end of time was universal. They held the Messiah would go out from Jerusalem to the known world, spread the Good News of salvation, and incite a massive pilgrimage to Palestine. As he gathered all Jews spread throughout the world home, he would call all peoples to Jerusalem so they, too, could worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Jerusalem, the Messiah would judge this massive throng in a Final Judgement, the Day of Yahweh.

The Resurrection appearance marked the starting point for this process. From Jerusalem, Jesus sent his followers out as missionaries to the known world. They would testify to the Risen Christ as the Good News of salvation. And the Good News would start the journey home for both Jews and Gentiles.

What happened to the Jerusalem pilgrimage? There were two possible answers. First, the Romans leveled Jerusalem in response to the Jewish revolt in 66 A.D. Both the city and the

Christian mother church turned to rubble. The Jerusalem church could no longer commission missionaries.

Second, Christians spiritualized the pilgrimage. The return home always included the theme of repentance; the sinner who walked away from God's dwelling place turned around and journeyed back. For the Christian, a heavenly Jerusalem became an abode for God. The sinner could find earthly reflection of Jerusalem in the local church community. Hence, conversion and repentance were close to home.

So, the followers saw their vocation within God's plan of salvation. The Father sent the Son into the world to lead everyone back to the Father. Jesus would involve his followers in that same work. Since they witnessed Jesus risen, his followers would witness to others.

But Jesus gave them more than a witness. He gave them the Holy Spirit. The breath and command to "Receive the Holy Spirit" must be seen as two parts of the same action. "Them" (the followers) was the object of "Jesus breathed on" and the indirect object of "Jesus said." As Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit out, the text inferred, his follower would breath it in, just as Jesus commanded.

We have already discussed the connection between breathe and Spirit in past studies. The word for "Spirit" in both Greek ("pnema") and Hebrew ("ruah") was the same for breathe or wind. Ancient people believed that any moment of air was the result of power. Breathe was the result of an inner power, one's life force or spirit. Strong winds that caused death and destruction were the result of God's inner power judging sin. The breath of inner life and violent winds, Jews believed, came from one source, God. So,

Weekly Sunday Readings Reflections

Word-Sunday.com

God's Spirit was a life-giving, and life-taking power. (See Genesis 1:1 and Acts 2:7).

Once the followers breathed in God's Spirit, they shared in the Messiah's power of judgment with the power to declare sins forgiven. John 20:23 referred to the followers' preaching of the Good News. Missionaries like the apostles and Paul, proclaimed a reconciliation of sinners to the Father through Christ; when sinners repented and converted to Christianity, they were cleansed in the waters of baptism. In the context of this verse, the process of reconciliation began with the proclamation of the Good News (declare sins forgiven) and continued through baptism (they are forgiven).

Notice the verb "are forgiven" is in the perfect tense. Forgiveness began in the past, continues into the present, and trails off into the indefinite future. In other words, once forgiven, always forgiven. But, does forgiveness begin with the preacher's declaration? No. The forgiveness of all sin began with Christ on the cross. The apostles and their successors proclaimed a forgiveness that flows from Christ's death and resurrection; the sinner partook in that forgiveness at the point of repentance, of turning one's life over to God.

An aside: Catholics refer to John 20:23 as the basis for the Sacrament of Penance (also known as Reconciliation or Confession). In a Church that is an assembly of sinners, this insight makes perfect sense. Christ continually calls the Church to never ending conversion, just as the Christian life is a constant road back to God. The sacrament is a celebration of God's forgiveness in which the priest represents God and Church to the

penitent. The priest proclaims the Good News of divine mercy to the penitent, advises him or her in spiritual counsel, and declares the penitent forgiven. In response, the penitent prays or performs an act of justice that symbolizes an openness of heart to God and neighbor (a so-called "penance"). In this way, the sacrament harkens back to Baptism (which is the original context for this verse) and, so, derives its power from Baptism. The Sacrament of Penance, then, continues the process of repentance Baptism put into place.

Catechism Themes: Pentecost (CCC 731-732)

With the power of the Spirit revealed at Pentecost, the activity of the Trinity was made known. God the Father sent his Son to share his very life, his very Spirit, with his followers. Now, disciples would carry on the work of the Son. They would celebrate the Spirit in their daily lives as they followed in the footsteps of their Lord.

God calls everyone to repentance, even second chances. How do you respond to his call? How do you help others with their call to conversion?

Pentecost revealed the power of God's forgiveness, his Spirit. Unlike the Force of Star Wars, the Spirit of God is personal. The Spirit establishes a link between the believer and the person of the Father through the person of the Son. And the Spirit makes that link personal. It is a link of love, hope, and joy based upon personal forgiveness.

Let us rejoice in the Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

Q: How can you celebrate a life in the Spirit this week