

# *Invisible and Uncontrollable Power*

## **Pentecost Sunday**

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### **Vigil**

- *Genesis 11:1-9*  
*Exodus 19:3-8a, 16-20b*  
*Ezekiel 37:1-14*  
*Joel 3:1-5*
  - *Psalms 104:1-2, 24, 35, 27-28, 29, 30*
  - *Romans 8:22-27*
  - *John 7:37-39*
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### **Pentecost Sunday**

- *Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11*
- *Psalms 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34*
- *1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13*  
*Romans 8:8-17*
- *John 20:19-23*

If asked to name a symbol of the Holy Spirit, most people will state the white dove, a common symbol of biblical illustrations, such as the Annunciation, in which the Spirit is present. Others, remembering the story of Pentecost, state the tongues of fire, which settled upon the heads of the Apostles and the Blessed Mother. This fiery symbol corresponds to the liturgical color, red, worn on feasts and celebrations of the Holy Spirit like Pentecost and the Sacrament of Confirmation.

These two symbols, however, are only in two occasions in the Holy Scriptures. Despite the frequent use of the dove to illustrate the Holy Spirit, the Spirit takes the form of a dove only at Christ's Baptism, a story told in all four Gospels. Likewise, the image of the flame is only at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles when the Spirit filled the Apostles at Pentecost, and the Church was formally launched on a redeemed, but unsuspecting world.

Jesus, Himself, uses metaphors when speaking about the Holy Spirit. In John 7:37-39, He refers to "*Rivers of living water...flow[ing] from within him who believes...*" The author of the Gospel then notes that Jesus is speaking of the Spirit that was to come once Jesus was glorified.

In the third chapter of John, Christ speaks of yet another symbol of the Holy Spirit during his clandestine conversation with the Pharisee, Nicodemus. That symbol is the *wind* (John 3:8). This metaphor corresponds to certain events in the



Old Testament where the action of God is described. At the moment of Creation, prior to God's great command, "let there be light," the book of Genesis tells us, "*a mighty wind swept over the waters [of the abyss]*" (Gen 1:2). As the Hebrews departed Egypt across the Red Sea, it is written in Exodus, "*the Lord swept the sea with a strong east wind*" (Exod 14:21). The wind also indicates God's movement on that first Christian Pentecost. Before the appearance of the tongues of fire, there was the sound of a strong driving wind (Acts 2:2).

It is a clever metaphor for the nature and

## The Holy Spirit

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action of the Holy Spirit, but an unusual one when placed beside the symbols of water, fire and the dove. Unlike these symbols, one can neither see, nor illustrate the wind. No one can describe what it looks like. It is invisible, having no shape or size, color or form. Unless it is in motion, it does not exist, and the only evidence of its existence is in the observance of its effects.

When illustrated, only a few twirled lines depict, not the wind itself, but its motion. We see the fog rolling in, relentlessly, as it moves with the wind. We observe the trees swaying, the leaves tossed around. We even feel the wind as it blows past us. We speak of a pleasant "cool breeze" or an intense "wind-chill factor." We cannot capture it, control it or harness it. It is completely out of our control. When it blows, there is no stopping it. We can only feel it, and observe the effect of its movement and its power.

If one visits Los Angeles in the late summer or early autumn, one would experience the great Santa Ana winds, more often than not, fanning the flames of great fires. If one were to live in the mid-west or the gulf-coast, one would know the power of great hurricanes, and the unpredictability of tornados. Yet the power of the wind can also have a more subtle effect. If one were to drive up and down the coast of San Francisco, one would observe the trees; large, sturdy, immovable -- yet

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bent inward, toward the land; years of being battered and formed by the invisible wind having caused them to take shape, leaning away from the sea.

So it is with the Spirit, the driving force of the Church. Try as we might to predict its movement, it is an impossible task. Yet who can deny the powerful, and subtle effects it has had on a world, sanctified by the ongoing presence of the Church, to whom the Spirit is given as Advocate? Who can deny the effects it has had on the Church itself, through thick and thin, grace and vice, virtue and scandal, as it continues its work as one of the oldest living institutions in history. Who can deny its movement in the consistency of our apostolic leadership, and the faith of the millions who follow Christ? Yet who can stop the ongoing movement of this invisible force that is the Holy Spirit, out of our control, blowing where it wills, yet relentlessly continuing to form and shape the Church, into the Body of Christ that God intends It to be.

The "Wind" is blowing, and nothing can stop it.

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May 21, 2010