

Spirit, water are life's essentials

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 20:19-23; (R1) Acts 2:1-11; (R2) 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13.

Pentecost celebrates the Holy Spirit's coming. The gift of the Old Testament was the law. The gift of the New Testament is the Holy Spirit. The first and the third readings tell of His coming.

The Gospel tells of His coming on the first Easter evening. The Acts tells of His coming on the Jewish feast of Pentecost.

On Easter Jesus breathed upon His apostles and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Why? To empower them to forgive sins and breathe into individuals the life of God destroyed by sin.

On Pentecost the Holy Spirit's coming was accompanied by a noise like a strong, driving wind and by tongues of fire. After being filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostles began to speak in foreign tongues and to proclaim the Gospel.

The Spirit was given on this occasion, not just to bring individuals to God by the forgiveness of sins, but to bring the entire world to God.

That is why St. Luke, the disciple of Paul, the missionary of the Gentiles, interprets praying tongues as "foreign tongues," to make clear that the Gospel is for all.

Since the Holy Spirit is spirit, it is almost impossible for us — who know all things through our senses — to grasp who He really is. To help us, Scripture uses all kinds of symbols.

Scripture pictures Him as a dove, the symbol of peace — a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

St. Luke likens Him to the wind, for the wind is powerful. Before steam, sailing vessels crossed the seas under the wind's propulsion. The wind also refreshes on a hot summer day and cleanses the air of pollution. The Spirit empowers, refreshes the spirit and cleanses the soul.

The Spirit is shown as tongues of fire, for He can put the right words in our mouths and the proper prayers on our lips. Jesus said: "When they take you before ... authorities, do not worry ... what you are to say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say" (Luke 12:11-12).

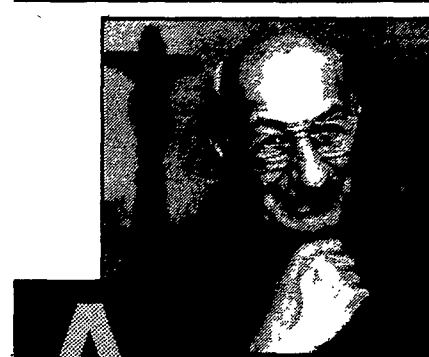
Paul wrote: "... the Spirit too

comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings" (Rom. 8:26).

Perhaps the most beautiful image for the Holy Spirit is the one Jesus Himself used in the Gospel read on the vigil of Pentecost, namely, that of water. "From within him rivers of living water shall flow" (Jn. 7:38). St. John comments: "Here he was referring to the Spirit, ..."

Water is one of the most necessary elements for life. Without it, the Earth will yield no harvest, plants would die, and animals as well as people would die more quickly than without food. Thus the ancient world's great civilizations settled around bodies of water. Babylon had the Tigris and Euphrates; Israel, the Jordan; and Egypt, the Nile.

This can also be said about water: whether it bubbles up from a spring or showers down from a cloud or flows in a river, the same water produces a thousand different, positive effects. The same water makes the grass grow, gives life to the margold and the maple tree. It produces the brook, the pond and the



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

lake in which fish live.

The Spirit enriches the church with His many gifts. One He makes courageous, others zealous and loving — different works but the same Spirit accomplishing them (R2).

Flour cannot become bread without water; and water cannot become the Body and Blood of Christ without the Holy Spirit. As breath, wind, fire and water make up life's very warp and woof, so we need the Holy Spirit to live the life of God.

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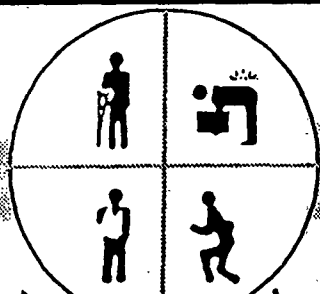


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