

Pentecost

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Most of us probably make the sign of the cross using these words several or more times a day. It reminds us that while Christians believe in one God the early Christian Community experienced God in a variety of ways: as Father and Creator of all things; as Son and Redeemer of all things; as the Holy Spirit, the sanctifier who makes all things holy. Their experience is put into words in the Nicene Creed written in the 4th century that we still pray today at mass. What is your experience of God like?

Next Sunday, The Most Holy Trinity Sunday, will give us the opportunity to reflect on the Triune God. Today, Pentecost, gives us the opportunity to reflect on the Holy Spirit. While most of us probably pray to God the Father or God the Son, we may not pray as often to God the Holy Spirit. The scripture readings today give us some insights into the Holy Spirit.

Take for example the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles written by St. Luke. Here Luke uses the image of the wind to describe the Holy Spirit ... a "strong, driving wind." He does this on purpose because the Hebrew word for wind is the same word for Spirit. For example, in the creation account found in the book of Genesis, the God's wind or Spirit hovers over the earth bringing forth life and order out of chaos.

Just as the wind is a mystery in the sense that it can be felt but not seen, the same seems to be true of the Holy Spirit. We are told, for example, that we receive the Holy Spirit in baptism and in confirmation – yet it is only when we live out our Christian life in prayer and community that we "feel" the presence of the Spirit. Have you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life? Most priests, I think, would say that we experience the presence of the Holy

Spirit at times in the Sacrament of Reconciliation when words of comfort come forth from our mouths whose source we don't really understand. It is God the Holy Spirit speaking through us.

St. Paul, in the second reading, suggests that it is the Holy Spirit that brings together the many parts of the Christian community to form the one body of Christ. It is this Holy Spirit, for example, that the cardinals of the Church pray for when they gather together to vote for a new pope. They realize that only the Holy Spirit can overcome the differences that separate them. Maybe you have prayed to the Holy Spirit at times of family divisions?

In the gospel reading from St. John we hear Jesus use the word "Advocate" to describe the Holy Spirit. Jesus will soon be leaving his disciples to join God the Father in heaven. However, he promises not to leave his disciples alone. He will send them the Holy Spirit who will guide them in the future when he is not able to do so.

The challenge that every generation of Christians have faced since then is to allow God's Spirit to work in and through us in a changing world. The Holy Spirit, our Advocate, helps us to read and respond to the signs of the time with an openness to new possibilities. This is the challenge, for example, that Pope Francis has faced as he reflects on how best the Church can minister to Catholic couples who are divorced and remarried. He asks, what roles and activities such couples can play and engage in on the parish level?

There is a certain risk in being open to the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and in our individual lives. How willing are you to open yourself to that risk?