

“Peace to you”

Breathe in me O Holy Spirit that my thoughts may all be holy;
Act in me O Holy Spirit that my works, too, may be holy;
Draw my heart O Holy Spirit that I love but what is holy;
Strengthen me O Holy Spirit to defend that is holy;
Guard me then O Holy Spirit that I always may be holy.

St. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430).

On this day when we remember and celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, I rejoice in the peace his presence brings, praising God in the words of Psalm 104:31-34.

- ³¹ May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
 may the LORD rejoice in his works—
³² who looks on the earth and it trembles,
 who touches the mountains and they smoke?

³³ I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
 I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him,
 for I rejoice in the LORD.

God displays his power and the Psalmist lifts his hands and voice in praise. But is it just the spectacle of raw power that moves the Psalmist? Perhaps not! When faced with the awesome reality of the resurrection as Jesus comes among them, the disciples are not immediately pointed towards power, but peace.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

John 20:19-22

Jesus twice greets his frightened, anxious disciples with, “Peace to you.” This was, and still is, a common greeting, but it carries a new weight on the lips of the Risen One. In his gospel, John has been at pains to emphasise Jesus' words of peace. The account of Mary meeting Jesus in the garden, which precedes this story, is one of profound peace. And before that, as Jesus gives his farewell address in the upper room, the clear emphasis is on peace. Now that peace is closely associated with the gift of the Spirit.

In my Christian tradition there has been a strong link between the Holy Spirit and power, of signs and wonders. I have seen too much to deny that link, but maybe it is not the most important effect of the Spirit's presence in my life. In recent days, particularly during this pandemic, I have seen that

the chief gift is peace, the peace of knowing that no matter what is happening around me, I am his, and he is mine.

As the Spirit moves among us this Pentecost may we all know the peace of the risen One in our lives. So we pause to pray for family and friends who need a special outpouring of the Spirit today, that they too will know his peace.

Pause and pray

The gift of God's Spirit, and the peace that brings, is not without cost! But it is no more than we can afford. Jesus says that if we are to receive his gift of peace we must come to him.

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John 7:37-39

As God's Holy Spirit comes to me again this Pentecost may I respond by coming to him and receiving his peace.

Pause and pray

May the love of the Father,
the tenderness of the Son,
and the presence of the Spirit,
gladden our heart
and bring peace to our soul,
this day and all days,
Amen.