

Pentecost Sunday, May 23, 2021
 “Who Is the Holy Spirit?” (Romans 8:22-27)

A little boy stops in front of a church with his bike and sees the pastor come out. The pastor says, *Come inside, I want to show you something.* The little boy says to the pastor, *But somebody will steal my bike.* The pastor says to him, *Don't worry, the Holy Spirit will watch it.* So the little boy goes inside and the pastor says, *Let me show you how to do sign of the cross. In the name of Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen. Now you try it.* So the boy says, *In the name of the Father and the Son. Amen.* The pastor asks, *What happened to the Holy Spirit?* The boy replied, *He's outside, watching my bike.*

Today is the day of Pentecost... the day set aside in the church year to focus on the giving of the Holy Spirit to the followers of Jesus. Luke describes it for us in the book of Acts. The disciples were in Jerusalem where Jesus had instructed them to remain. He was gone – ascended into heaven – but had promised to send someone in his place. Then on the day of Pentecost, Jewish festival that took place 50 days after the Passover and a day when the city of Jerusalem was filled with travelers from all over, that promise was fulfilled.

The disciples and 120 others were in the upper room, when suddenly there was the rush of wind and tongues of fire, and the Holy Spirit filled those disciples. Immediately, they went out into the streets and began proclaiming the grace of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And the miracle was that everyone could understand these Galileans as if they were speaking in the hearer's native tongue.

Known as the birthday of the Christian church, Pentecost was an amazing day. Three thousand people were baptized. And they, too, received the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is that rather strange third Person of the Holy Trinity. We, of course, believe he is co-eternal and equal in every way with Father and Son. But, like the boy in the joke, there are all sorts of ideas about who the Holy Spirit is and what he does. So, today I thought we would look briefly at the third person of the Trinity.

When Jesus speaks of the One who is coming, the Greek word he uses is *Paraclete*, which means *one who is called alongside to help*. This word, *Paraclete*, has been translated differently, and these different translations, I think, give us a fuller picture of who the Spirit is.

In our gospel text today, he is called Advocate. As such, he bears witness of Jesus Christ. Jesus says of him, *He will guide you into all truth.* Therefore, the Spirit tells our hearts the truth about Jesus, helps us to believe in him, and supports us as we share with others the good news of Jesus. In these ways, he fulfills the role of Advocate.\

However, even though we believe and trust in Jesus, we are often tempted to go against God's will. Here, the Holy Spirit serves as Helper. In this role, he counsels us when we struggle to make the right decisions and works to make us holy and acceptable before God.

He is also called Comforter. He gives us the peace and comfort of Christ in our times of grief and sorrow, and will not abandon us when we feel distant from God.

Now, all of these titles are somewhat synonymous, but the one I really like is the way the Apostle Paul speaks of the HS in our reading from Romans: *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

So, according to Paul, the Spirit is our Intercessor – our Prayer, if you will. The Spirit is God present in us to help us pray, even when our only prayer is a groan or a sigh. Nonetheless, that groan or sigh is still a prayer offered to God by the Holy Spirit through us. It is an expression of the state of our soul at a time when words are hard to come by or fall short of adequately describing what is really going on in the depths of our lives. The following story provides a good example of the Holy Spirit as God Present in us as our Intercessor.

Over at last. That's the only thought Melissa could think about just how. Over at last. The funeral was finished, the committal service completed. Her husband, Carl, was safely tucked into the grave. She was home now – and weary. How had she ever endured the year of Carl's agony?

Carl's illness was diagnosed almost exactly a year ago. His doctor had caught it at one of Carl's regular checkups. When the results of the tests came back, Dr. Bean was a bit upset. Melissa remembered his phone call like it was yesterday. *You'd better get in here, Carl. We've got a lot of work to do and we need to begin immediately.* But nothing the doctors tried had worked. Carl was in and out of hospitals and treatment centers all year. He had gotten so sick. Melissa could only think of that year as a kind of hell. She now wondered what kind of new hell awaited her.

As she wandered aimlessly around her home, she didn't know what to do. Her two grown children had lived too far away to make it back for the funeral. But that was alright with Melissa. They had come so often during the year of Carl's dying. She thought their presence during the waning days of his life was more important than their presence at his funeral. Still, she missed them terribly. It was tough after the funeral to come home to an empty house. It was as though she was lost in the caverns of her own home.

Several times she tried to pray. It was the same thing each time. She could not find the words. She didn't even know what to say to God. She simply didn't know how to pray in this dire moment. Words simply would not come. But groans came – and sighs. Groans and sighs poured forth from the innermost depth of her being. Gut wrenching groans, bone shaking sighs. She could only hope that God could make something out of her groaning. That's all she had for God right now. It was as if she had forgotten how to pray.

At the end of her murmuring lament she trudged off to bed. She would be alone there too. As she cast herself down on her pillow, she heard a familiar sound. The first fresh breath of spring blew gently through the bedroom window, kissing her aching body with a hint of new life. Melissa felt a peace she hadn't felt for some time. Her sighs and groanings had made their way to heaven in a perfect prayer offered by the Holy Spirit.

May we, too, give thanks for the Spirit – our Advocate, our Helper, our Comforter, our Intercessor – who searches the depths of our hearts, who comforts us in times of grief and sorrow, who does not abandon us when we feel distant from God, who councils us in difficult times when we struggle to make right choices, who offers the right prayer for each occasion when we are unable find the proper words.

On this day of Pentecost, we celebrate the life-giving Holy Spirit who is present and active within each of us, present and active in the whole church, and present and active in all of creation. This is especially true for Tristan. Today we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit in his life as he affirms the promises made on his behalf at his baptism. Our prayer for you, Tristan, is that the Holy Spirit will guide and empower you as you mature in your faith and continue to serve your Lord.

Yes, my friends, God is present – with us, in us, and for us now and always! Amen.