

I

How is your “Spirit Awareness Meter”? Do you know when the Spirit is beside you?

You cannot see the Spirit. But you know when the Spirit of Christ surrounds you. Maybe you had a significant experience in your life, in which you could feel Christ walking with you. Maybe in times like these, at Pentecost, you become aware of the Holy Spirit’s presence more than you do when you are going shopping or mowing grass or walking the dog. Or maybe you are one of those people who can feel the Spirit with you no matter where you are or what you are doing.

How is “your” Spirit Awareness Meter?

When I lived in Morristown, NJ just for a little while, during a time when I was writing extensively, I noticed that every time I would go out for a walk, no matter what time of day or evening, the town would be filled with dogs. So many dogs. I had never seen so many dogs. And then I noticed that it wasn’t just that there were many dogs. These were seeing eye dogs. The town was filled it seemed with blind people, walking along the sidewalks and going in and out of shops, confidently strolling through the park, sitting on benches. I discovered from asking someone who lived in the town that Morristown in fact was home to a nonprofit organization called “The Seeing Eye, Inc.” The nonprofit’s mission is to “enhance the independence, dignity, and self-confidence of people who are blind, through the use of specially trained Seeing Eye dogs.”<sup>[1]</sup> They raise and breed puppies for the specific purpose of becoming seeing eye dogs. And here of course is the interesting part. They train not just the dogs, but the people, who need to know the proper use, handling, and care of the dogs. Having a Seeing Eye Dog is not just about a dog facilitating a human. It’s about cultivating a very special, meaningful, close relationship between human and canine, one that will last many, many years and enrich the lives of both parties.

On the company’s website, the management currently explains that they have partnered so far more than 17,000 guide dog teams throughout North America. John Bauer, one of the company’s seeing eye “grads” describes having a “seeing eye dog” beside him as like having a pair of wings. His dog is both a companion and a guide. John tells us that not only does the dog enable him to live a fulfilling life, walking wherever he would like in public places and experiencing events and people, but having the dog has also increased his relationships with others, because people will stop and talk to him, socialize, and get to know him. They are drawn to his dog. The relationship has increased his social life and ultimately his psychological health.

Those who have either Seeing Eye Dogs or other emotional support animals know that no longer must they walk through an unknown and sometimes terrifying world blind, but they now have a guide to walk beside them, to be their eyes, to see the road ahead, to make judgment calls, to defend them if necessary. For many, this sweet angel dog is their savior and advocate. In Greek, we would call it their “paracletos.”

Paraclete! No, not Parakete! Paraclete! The Greek word for advocate, supporter, intercessor, guide. This is the word used in the scriptures today for the Holy Spirit. For etymologically, the word “paracletos” meant “one called to walk alongside.”

Our spiritual “eyes,” our defender and advocate, our spiritual and emotional support system, our Christ companion in the world, the “paraclete” helps us to navigate the world while staying spiritually and emotionally sound. Jesus knew that we walk crippled through this world, that most of the time, we are blinded by a thousand distractions that keep us from staying on the right path that leads us to the kingdom of heaven. Just as Jesus’ disciples worried when he was leaving them, because they felt lost without him, without guidance, without their sense of mission, without their compass for right and wrong, without a strategy or goal for the future and what they were called to do, and Jesus assured them that an advocate would come, who would walk beside them just as he had, we too are granted that same advocate.

Jesus knows, we are no good alone. Without him we can do nothing. With him, we can do anything (John 15:5; Philippians 4:13). The Holy Spirit enriches our lives, leads us when we are feeling lost, enlightens us when we can’t see the truth, guides us in the right paths, and comforts us when things go awry. For like a “Seeing Eye Dog,” Jesus did not just send us a helper but a relationship. He sent us Himself. In the form of the Holy Spirit, Jesus remains with us, walks with us, talks with us, joins with us in life’s journey from beginning to end.

“I will be with you always,” he said.

Jesus was God’s Son and Sacrifice, our wake-up call and our transfiguring catalyst, but the Holy Spirit is God’s support system.

To “walk with God” or to have God “walk beside us” is the oldest phrase in the scriptures signaling someone’s relationship with God, the kind of person in whom you know God dwells because you can see it in their walk, their talk, their demeanor, their love for others, their sense of security, their calmness in the face of danger, their kindness, their gentleness. You can read in the scriptures this phrase commenting on the lives of the patriarchs and many who came after them. “They walked with God.” They not only lived a good life, but they were constantly aware of their relationship with God. Their lives were focused on that awareness, and they allowed God to guide them, to move them, and to orient them.

The early church would be founded in this same way. Those who came out of that Pentecost experience, in which the Holy Spirit touched down upon them in a dynamic and powerful way, emerged a new person, a person animated to share the gospel, excited about what the world could become, charged up to be change-makers, assured in what they were meant to be and do.

With the Holy Spirit as their guide, they would go out and change the world as they knew it. We are called to keep that mission alive.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Truth, our advocate and guide, has been sent to each and every one of us to guide us and comfort us, advocate on our behalf, and lead us into the future, proclaiming Christ risen, calling for repentance, and granting forgiveness to all God's people wherever they reside.

To be an apostle of Christ is to be a traveler, not to be in our homes or buildings or behind closed doors, but to be a traveler on the roads and byways of life with the Holy Spirit by our side, our eyes and ears and our compass in the world, so that all can be redeemed.

The Holy Spirit comes to you not just for your sake but for the sake of the world that God so loves. The world and people God created and called good.

The world and people God redeemed by sending his only Son to be put to death by the same people he meant to save.

The world and people God has never given up on.

The world and people that include you and I and everyone you come in contact with, and even those you don't.

The world and people God will never stop trying to save, no matter who they are or what they've done, even to the moment of truth.

God never gives up on God's people. And neither must we.

This holy Pentecost, may you feel the power of the Holy Spirit around you, within you, and beside you. May you open your hearts and lives and allow Christ to guide you in your being and your living. And may the peace of Christ and the love of Christ go with you wherever you go.

Amen.

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[1] <https://seeingeye.org>.

ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., by Lori Wagner

II

There are certain human experiences that are universally annoying, but everyone has to experience them at some time. Like waiting in lines. And in our rushed and privileged society, it seems like we have less and less capacity for waiting.

A woman tells of trying to get a table at a very popular and very busy restaurant.

She approached the hostess and asked quite brusquely, "Will it be long?" The hostess kept writing in her hostess book, so the woman leaned closer and asked again a little more firmly, "Will it be long?"

Without looking up, the hostess said, "About ten minutes."

A few minutes later, the woman heard this announcement over the speaker: "Willette B. Long, your table is ready. Willette B. Long, your table is ready." (1)

Is that what Jesus' friends, the disciples, were thinking on the day of Pentecost when they gathered to pray and wait for the Holy Spirit? Will it be long?

I read an interesting study this week that took place in Holland about awkward pauses in conversations. Have you ever been in a conversation, and then the person you're chatting with suddenly goes silent? It's disconcerting, isn't it?

Researchers in Holland ran a study to measure how long a conversational gap has to last before it creates negative emotions in the people involved. They discovered that all it takes is four seconds of silence in a conversation to inspire feelings of anxiety, exclusion, incompatibility, and awkwardness. Just four seconds of silence makes us feel insecure and uncomfortable.

A member of the research team summarized the study in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*: "Conversational flow is associated with positive emotions, and a heightened sense of belonging, self-esteem, social validation and consensus. Disrupting the flow by a brief silence produces feelings of rejection and negative emotions." (2)

Our Bible passage for today doesn't tell us how long Jesus' friends, the disciples, had to wait until they received the Holy Spirit, the gift promised by God. I bet it was longer than four seconds. Did they experience feelings of rejection and anxiety as they waited? Definitely not. They had spent 40 days with the resurrected Jesus. They finally understood that Jesus truly was God in the flesh. And they finally trusted that his plans were trustworthy, and his promises were true. Ask yourself this morning: How would it change your life if you trusted that God's plans for you are trustworthy, and God's promises are completely true?

I think we see the answer in the courage and obedience of the disciples. They had no idea what God was going to do, but they went to Jerusalem and they gathered together in prayer and they waited just as Christ told them to.

It reminds me of an incident that occurred on January 1, 2002. Two young men got in line at a Seattle movie theater to see the movie *Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones*. However, the movie wasn't released until May 16, 2002. So those young men waited outside the theater 4 ½ months to see their favorite movie. Can you believe that? I sure hope the waiting was worth it. (3)

Jesus' friends waited fifty days after Christ's ascension to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, but the payoff was definitely worth it. Our Bible passage describes the moment the Holy Spirit came upon them like this: "Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." (Acts 2: 2-4)

On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus were gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. All the original twelve were there, save one. Judas' place had been taken by Matthias, who had been chosen by the casting of lots. That this was an unreliable means of choosing officers for a church board is attested to by the fact that Matthias is never mentioned again. I guess that is why we don't cast lots today in order to choose church officers.

Jesus' brothers were there. The resurrection had obviously healed some wounds because his brothers had been embarrassed earlier by Jesus' ministry. His mother was there, too. She was still pondering things in her heart, I imagine. Events too extraordinary for a simple Jewish mother to comprehend were far too commonplace in her life. The agony of the cross was her agony as well as his. His resurrection was joyous comfort. Still, though wounds heal, they leave scars.

"The women" were there as well. We do not know their names. It was the cultural assumption of that day that women counted for less than men—women, slaves, children. A sad but common prejudice throughout the world. Yet the women proved themselves more courageous in the drama of his crucifixion than did the men. They were with him all the way. We may not know their names, but we know that they were there.

There they were—this motley band of earnest believers—still shaken by the events of the past fifty days—saddened by the departure of their leader to "sit at the right hand of the Father"—but willing to trust that Jesus would fulfill his promise and grant them the power to go on.

Here's a statistic from the modern world that is quite interesting. A study in the *International Journal of Financial Research* estimates that it costs major organizations an average of \$136 million dollars to suddenly lose a CEO to illness or death if they don't have some other leadership plan in place. If the CEO is fired due to some scandal or controversy, the costs may be even higher. The study makes it clear that every major organization needs to create a strong bench of trained leaders ready to step in and guide an organization if the CEO dies. (4)

The disciples of Jesus were confronted with the task of replacing their CEO. Jesus had been crucified, resurrected and now had ascended to be with the Father. He had spent three years training his disciples to carry on his message and his ministry after his death. But how do you take the place of the Messiah, God in the flesh? There's only one way: with the power of the Holy Spirit motivating and empowering his followers every step of the way. And that is what Pentecost is all about.

There are three ingredients that are necessary to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the world. **The first is power.** Jesus, in his final instructions to his disciples, told them to wait in Jerusalem **“until you are clothed with power from on high.”** (Luke 24:49) That power would be the Holy Spirit at work in their lives.

For example, on the Day of Pentecost Simon Peter preached and 3,000 souls were added to the church. But that's not all. In a relatively brief period of history the tiny Christian community swept across the entire Roman Empire. Power was promised and power was delivered. The very gates of hell were threatened by the battering ram of God's Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit is experienced, people walk with courage and confidence. No one asks, “Can we do this, dare we try that?” Nothing is impossible to people who are led by the Spirit.

If you've ever seen lightning strike a tree, it is a powerful sight. To us, it looks like a bolt of lightning came sizzling down from the sky and hit the tree. But in reality, there is a natural amount of electric energy stored up in the ground. When a “leader bolt” of electricity comes down from the clouds, it meets up with the stored electricity in the ground and creates the illusion of an explosion of power and light. The tree is just the vessel to connect the heavens and the earth.

That's what happened on the day of Pentecost, and that's what happens today when believers pray to receive God's power to go and do ministry, to be God's witnesses, to be the Body of Christ in their communities and in the world.

There is no sadder thing that can happen to a person or a group of people than to have a sense of powerlessness. “There is nothing that we can do,” we whine. Often we can do more than we think. If God is with us we can say to mountains, “Be moved . . .” and geologists will come from all over the world to seek a rational, scientific explanation for the disappearance of a peak that once rose 4,000 feet above sea level.

Every study of growing churches indicates that the attitude of the congregation is the important ingredient in the vitality of the church's witness. If we believe that it is God's will that we should be a church that is alive and growing and serving the needs of people, then we will be. It is not simply the power of positive thinking. It is trust in a promise— “the Holy Spirit will come upon you and you shall have power . . .”

**The second ingredient in taking the Gospel of Christ to the world is purpose. There is no power without a great purpose calling us to accomplish great things.** That purpose comes from a shared vision. God declares through the prophet Joel, “I will pour out my

Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams . . .”

What vision has God given to the people called Christians? It is a vision of the entire world joined into one family—the family of God.

A man named Roy Lloyd interviewed the late Mother Teresa multiple times over the years and her answer to one of his questions jumps out in this context. He asked her, “What’s the biggest problem in the world today?”

She answered, without hesitation, “The biggest problem in the world today is that we draw the circle of our family too small. We need to draw it larger every day.” (5)

Yes, we do. We need to draw our family circle large enough to encompass every man, woman and child on this planet.

On this day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gave the disciples the vision and the power to reach every person on earth with the message and ministry of Jesus Christ. It’s why people from every nation and language and culture and color gather in churches all over the world to worship and work in the name of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was drawing the circle of our family as large as possible to include the whole world.

Can you and I visualize what it would require for us to make the kind of impact on our community that God calls for us to make? What would we need to do to minister to the needs of persons within the sphere of influence of this congregation if we were all God calls us to be? Because the Holy Spirit is given to enlarge our vision to go and do ministry. To get outside our church walls and outside our community to find those who need the healing and hope and truth of the Kingdom of God. That is our purpose, our reason for being. It is a vision given to us by Christ. “Where there is no vision, “the Bible declares, “the people perish.”

**A church called by the Holy Spirit to take the Gospel of Christ to the world has power, it has purpose—and it has one thing more. It has God’s presence.** Jesus had ascended to be with the Father. What would his disciples do now? He was the Way, the Truth, the Life for them. What would happen to the sheep without the shepherd? They were not to worry, Jesus told them. “I will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever . . .” (John 14: 16) That Counselor came like a mighty wind, like tongues of fire at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is Christ’s presence in the hearts of his followers.

Many of you know the story of Florence Nightingale. Nightingale was a social reformer and the founder of modern nursing. She led a team of women who provided medical care to British soldiers in the Crimean War in the 1850s. The improvements she instituted in medical care and cleanliness in the medical tents saved countless soldiers’ lives.

She was known for her tireless care for her patients. At night, she made the rounds of all the medical tents. The soldiers knew from the light of her lamp that she was working

through the night, ensuring that she was aware of everyone's needs. They even nicknamed her "Lady of the Lamp."

Nightingale once said, "If I could give you information of my life it would be to show how a woman of very ordinary ability has been led by God in strange and unaccustomed paths to do in His service what He has done in her. And if I could tell you all, you would see how God has done all, and I nothing. I have worked hard, very hard, that is all; and I have never refused God anything." (6)

What an inspiration for us all. "I have never refused God anything."

Take one more look at the believers gathered together in that upper room in Jerusalem. They were men and women of "very ordinary ability." Just like you and me and Florence Nightingale. They weren't chosen because they had any particular skill or charisma or courage. But God chose to bless them with God's power, God's purpose and God's presence through the Holy Spirit. And through them, God chose to bless the whole world with the message and ministry of Jesus Christ.

That is who we are today. We are not alone. God is with us. He has not left us comfortless, or powerless or without purpose. A mighty wind has roared. God has sent the flames of power and purpose and presence on us. Now it is time for us to go do His will—to preach the Kingdom of God and do acts of mercy and justice and healing that show the world the love of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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1. Source: Tim Davis.

2. "Awkward Silences: 4 Seconds Is All It Takes to Feel Rejected" by Maia Szalavitz, *Time Magazine*, Dec. 30, 2010  
<https://healthland.time.com/2010/12/30/awkward-silences-4-seconds-is-all-it-takes-to-feel-rejected/>

3. *Uncle John's 24-Karat Gold Bathroom Reader*, Bathroom Readers' Institute (Kindle Edition).

4. "How Companies Can Prepare for Sudden CEO Turnover" by Adam Dean, Nov. 7, 2019, *MIT Sloane Management Review*, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/how-companies-can-prepare-for-sudden-ceo-turnover/>.

5. Roy Lloyd, via Ecunet, "Bottom Drawer Chat," #1202, 9/12/97. Cited by Dr. David E. Leininger. [http://www.lectionary.org/Sermons/Lein/Mark/Mark\\_08.27-38\\_StoryWorth.htm](http://www.lectionary.org/Sermons/Lein/Mark/Mark_08.27-38_StoryWorth.htm).

6. Florence Nightingale, quoted in "My Heart Sings". *Christianity Today*, Vol. 33, no. 5. (Don Argue, Leadership, Vol. 14, no. 2.) Cited by Jim Davis, [http://www.focusongod.com/Luke\\_6\\_27\\_38.htm](http://www.focusongod.com/Luke_6_27_38.htm).

ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., [Dynamic Preaching Sermons](#), by King Duncan





### III

It is said that Americans are the most time-conscious people in the world. We are always in a hurry. We invented fast food, instant coffee, instant messenger, express mail, express oil changes and expressways. We are people constantly on the move. As one man put it, we're people who shout at our microwave ovens to hurry up.

I'm not going to ask you to hold up your hand if you enjoy waiting . . . for anything. That would hold up my sermon too much. And that would be a cardinal sin.

One lady wrote about her frustrations waiting in line. She wrote: "Here are the reasons I'd like to thank Wal-Mart, K-Mart, and my local grocer for having 25 checkout lanes and only three open at any given time . . .

"Waiting in long lines keeps my domestic brain from going completely idle there's so much to learn!

"I can catch up on my magazine reading without buying any.

"I have time to leave my cart in line and run back to get the 13 things on my list I forgot.

"I can be one of those annoying cell phone users and catch up on all my phone calls to my insurance agent, mother-in-law, and Auntie Anne.

"I can catch a quick catnap now rather than on the drive home.

"I can assess what other people have in their carts and get exciting new dinner ideas.

"I can finally apply my top coat of nail polish with plenty of drying time.

"I can run next door and pick up my dry cleaning.

"I can update my coupon organizer and leave the trash in the we-never-open-enough-checkout-lanes store instead of my purse.

"I can practice my standup comedy routines on unsuspecting fellow customers.

"I can practice some standing yoga poses and then do those isometric muscle-contracting exercises no one else in line is supposed to know you're doing.

"I can taste test my package of the newest low-carb, zero-transfat, Splenda-saturated cookies.

"I can breathe heavily on my T-bones so they're defrosted in time for dinner and I won't have to leave them out on the driveway in the hot late afternoon sun as I normally do." (1) Things to do while you're waiting in line. We've all been there, haven't we? Times when we've had to wait.

Dr. Stanley Sneeringer writes about the impatience we feel while waiting for an elevator to arrive. Manufacturers such as Otis Elevator have this down to a science. They know that a good waiting time for an elevator is in the neighborhood of 15 seconds, because at around 40 seconds people start to get visibly upset. "When they're waiting for an elevator, as well as when they're in an elevator, they don't really feel

they can do much productive,” says one executive at Otis. Once on board, elevator antsiness only intensifies while waiting for the door to close.

Dr. Sneeringer asks, “How long do you think you generally have to wait? Twenty seconds? Ten seconds? Five seconds? Two seconds?”

“[The] answer: only two to four seconds, which doesn’t sound like much, but feels for some of us like a very long time. And not just if we’re anxious Americans. ‘If you travel in Asia at all,’ observes [this same executive], ‘you will notice that the CLOSE DOOR button in elevators is the one with the paint worn off. It gets used more than any other button in the elevator.’ Asians can’t wait for that door to close so they can be on their way.

Ironically, notes Dr. Sneeringer, the CLOSE DOOR button is often disabled by building managers for liability reasons. People keep pushing the button and it doesn’t even work. It is a dummy, a piece of exercise equipment for anxious fingers.” (2)

The point is that few of us enjoy waiting: in an elevator, in a long shopping line, in the doctor’s office or wherever we happen to be.

One woman tells about arriving 20 minutes early for her son’s one o’clock appointment with the doctor. She watched patient after patient disappear into the various rooms. When she was still sitting in the waiting room 1 1/2 hours later, she’d had enough and had become pretty irate. Fortunately, as she got up and went to the receptionist, she calmed down enough to handle it without anger.

When she arrived at the desk she said calmly, “I know my son’s appointment was for one o’clock. Can you tell me if that was a.m. or p.m.?” (3)

What a great way to express your frustration. I wish I could come up with witty lines like that when I’m frustrated. And yet, waiting is a part of life.

Here is something that you need to know: waiting plays a big role in the Bible. Think about it. Biblical characters spent a considerable part of their lives waiting.

Noah waited 120 years until it began to rain.

Abraham waited until he was 99 years old before his promised son Isaac was born.

The children of Israel waited in slavery for 400 years before God sent Moses to deliver them.

God told Moses he would lead his people out of slavery, but then made him wait in the desert 40 years before he was allowed to do anything about it.

Joseph, unjustly accused, spent 14 years in prison. Then God elevated him to second-in-command in Egypt.

God had David anointed as king, but then David waited for years until the death of Saul before he actually ascended to the throne.

Job waited a lifetime, 60-70 years, before he was vindicated.  
Even Jesus waited for 30 years before he started his ministry.  
Waiting was a part of life for the heroes of the Bible, just as it is part of life for us.

In today's lesson from the book of Acts, Jesus gives his disciples a difficult assignment. He tells them to wait. It was just before Christ's ascension into heaven. Listen to these important words: "In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating

with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised . . ."

Don't you think that is interesting? Before they did anything else, they were to wait. It's a little bit ironic. The Book of Acts is sometimes called, "The Acts of the Apostles." It is a record of their activities the many things they did. But here in the first chapter of the book Christ is telling them to do nothing. First, they are to wait. But what is it for which they are waiting?

They are awaiting the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Then a few verses later he says to them: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

This is the last thing Christ says to them before he leaves this earth. Actually there are basically two commands that Christ gives them in this passage. The first is to wait for the gift of the Spirit and the second is that they are to be his witnesses. These two commands are sequential: wait and then witness. Why do I say they are sequential? It is the Holy Spirit that gives us the power we need to bear witness to our faith. No waiting no witness, at least no effective witness. I suspect this is why many of us are so feeble in our witness to faith. We are not spending enough time waiting.

Many of us grew up loving the King James Version translation of Isaiah 40:31: "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Waiting precedes witnessing. The Holy Spirit gives us power for this demanding task.

I like the way one unknown author describes the work of the Spirit. He uses the analogy of a common source of power, gasoline. He says that the power of gasoline can be experienced in two different ways. It can be unleashed, or it can be harnessed.

Suppose I were to drop a lighted match in a ten gallon barrel of gasoline. What will happen at that point? I would probably die. Ten gallons of gas can produce quite an explosion.

On the other hand, suppose I were to pour that ten gallons of gas into the gas tank of my car. Then, depending on the fuel efficiency of my car, I might be able to drive hundreds of miles. Dropping a lighted match into a barrel of gasoline might produce a spectacular effect, but a controlled burn will take me a lot further in life.

The Holy Spirit is the fuel in the Christian's tank to help us to be all that Christ has called us to be. We wait on the gift of the Holy Spirit, then we seek to live for Christ. If we want to mount up with wings as eagles, we must first wait upon the Lord. We must pray for Christ's Holy Spirit within us.

There was once a German Lutheran missionary to Sumatra named Ludwig Nommensen. Ludwig has been described as one of the most successful missionaries ever to preach the gospel.

Ludwig went to work with a tribe in a remote area of Sumatra. The village chief welcomed him. He said, "You have 2 years to learn our customs and convince us you have a message worth hearing." The chief wanted Ludwig to explain how Christianity differs from the morality and the traditions the tribe already had. "We already know what is right," the chief explained. "We too have laws that say we must not steal, or take our neighbor's wives, or tell lies."

Ludwig replied, "That's true. But my God supplies the power needed to keep those laws."

This startled the chief. "Can you really teach my people to live better?"

"No, I can't," responded Ludwig. "But if they receive Jesus Christ, God will give them the strength to do what is right."

The chief invited him to stay another 6 months, during which Ludwig preached the gospel and taught villagers how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of Christians. "You can stay as long as you want," the chief finally announced. "Your God walks with [people] and gives them strength to do the things He requires." (4)

Many Christian believers have never grasped this principle. The Christ life can never be lived apart from the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. We need to spend time waiting, as well as witnessing. We need to pray that God will give us His Spirit to live within us that we might be empowered to be all that He has called us to be.

This feast of the Ascension is not so much about Jesus' departure but rather the new empowerment that happens when Jesus, raised from the dead, is associated with his Father in the transformation of the world. For Jesus ascends in power to bestow power upon his followers. Jesus vanishes from our midst in one kind of presence in order for us to be empowered by the Holy Spirit he sends upon us.

The angels make this point in almost a comical way to the Apostles. They stand, staring up into the sky, looking at Jesus as his body vanishes. "Men of Galilee," they say, "Why are you looking into the heavens?" This is just like the angels message to the women on Easter morning: Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is raised. Now we can live in his resurrection. He does the same thing to the disciples on their way to Emmaus: once they recognize him, he vanishes from their sight. The point is not his risen Body, as essential as his resurrection is. The point is that we are now empowered to live his life and continue his ministry.

This is what the Holy Spirit accomplishes in us: our prayer, our service, our care for each other, our witness to Jesus in our lives, our inviting, our sharing—all of this is the power of Jesus given to us through the Holy Spirit. Jesus wants no pity-parties. He wants no extended grieving. He does not need us to cling onto his body. Rather, filled with the same power of God by which

Jesus was raised from the dead, he wants us to live risen lives, to live Easter and be Easter in the world today.

Then and only then can we experience the wisdom of the words of Isaiah: “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

1. Sermon Fodder, <http://www.sermonfodder.com/>.

2. <http://www.faithlutheranchurch.org/00sermons/07-23-00.htm> 3. Clean Laffs, <http://www.gophercentral.com/sub/sub-jokes.html>.

4. Davon Huss, <http://www.sermoncentral.com/illustrations/scripture/illustrations-on-romans-715-725.asp?passage=romans%207:15-7:25>. I hate Sundays when there are two very important events to remember.

IV Desiano

Do we really want things to get back to normal?

We hear that said so often—when the kids are back in class, and everyone is back in the office, when I can go to a ballgame and just enjoy a hotdog, or when I can visit with friends at the restaurant. We've been deprived of so much everyday activity, we cannot wait till the deprivation stops. Really? You want the traffic jams, the crowded busses and subways, the distractions of having people at their computers all around you? You want to go back to where families had a hard time catching up with each other, and parents had to drive their children from one event to another all Saturday and Sunday? The shutdown we have endured has given us the luxury of being able to think of our ordinary lives and question them. Do we want things to go back to normal or do we want to change them now that we see the problems? What about our faith lives? Do we want them to return to normal? You know what that means for most Catholics—most of us not worshipping on Sunday; most of those who do worship coming at the last minute and leaving as soon as they can; not many parents teaching their children about faith or praying with them at home. Or too many of using our faith as an identity more than a way of life. What do we think is normal about our faith lives?

The Scriptures on this Pentecost Sunday tell us what's normal—that we all live empowered by the Spirit of the risen Jesus, that we experience a sense of unity with God that transforms us, and that this sense of unity would extend to every person without limit. We see so many kinds of people experiencing the Holy Spirit in the first reading, all of them rejoicing at the voice of God. We see Jesus tell his disciples that they are sent forth just as he was sent forth by the Father. We hear Paul, in the second reading, speaking of the gifts that each one of us has received—all to contribute to the Christian life we share in faith.

Today's feast of Pentecost gives us an opportunity to look at our Catholic lives not as we usually live them but as God calls us to live them. This starts with us realizing the gifts that God has given us as a family of believers—not only the Mass we celebrate, but all the Sacraments of the Church, the Scriptures that invite us to know God more fully, the moral vision that guides us to live and love in God, the world-wide community of believers that we belong to, and the vision of the Kingdom that draws us forward. But the Spirit's gifts come to our personal lives as well because every one of us, with the unique personalities and talents that we have, has been transformed by God. Some of us are endlessly thoughtful, some of us feel the pain of others right away, some of us know how to encourage people when they are down, and others of us know how to console and heal those who are hurting. Every one of us has many gifts that we can bring to the lives of others. Because, for believers, normal doesn't mean hiding in a shell but rather sharing what God has given us.

Pentecost is called the Birthday of the Church—but not as if that was an event that happened two thousand years ago. No, Pentecost is a Birthday more in the sense that the Holy Spirit is constantly giving birth to new life within us and around us every day. The dynamics of faith do not happen once or twice in a life. Rather, they are constant because Jesus is constantly sending us forth and the Spirit is constantly gifting us, all with a purpose of transforming humankind into the image of Christ.

For months we have seen people getting vaccinated, holding up their vaccination cards, so relieved to be able to get out of the prison of their fears, and so ready to be able to

move about more freely. Today's feast tells us that we have all been more than vaccinated as followers of Jesus. We have not been injected but transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. We are not just protected, but rather we are being empowered by the Spirit of the Risen Jesus. "Receive the Holy Spirit," Jesus says to his disciples . . . and to us.

Our Catholic lives are an unbroken experience of receiving the Holy Spirit. That is the normal of our Christian lives that we have to rediscover. Today's feast is an opportunity for us to more fully recognize this and to more powerfully celebrate it.



V

Memorial Day – A Day to remember not veterans but those who were denied coming home to be veterans. We remember those who made the sacrifice on our behalf.

Why May?

It was a spring morning in 1866, just after the Civil War that had devastated the South. A group of Southerners did something quite extraordinary. They marched down the streets of what was left of their town to a cemetery. There they decorated the graves of the soldiers. All the soldiers Union as well as Confederate The mothers and daughters and widows had buried their dead. Now they buried their hatred. The time for healing had come. It was the first **memorial day**.

Have you ever wondered why **memorial day** is marked in May? Its date doesn't recall some historic battle. Or the start of some war. Or the signing of an armistice. Why, then, May? For a very practical reason. Because it is a time when flowers bloom. Flowers with which to decorate graves.

We come to reflect. We reflect upon the awful cost of war and the fact that freedom is costly. Consider if you will these footnotes of history concerning the battle at Shiloh. If Lew Wallace who fought on the Shiloh battlefield, had been killed, then we would never have known of the great American literary work BEN HUR. If Ulysses. S. Grant had been slain at Shiloh we would have lost a president of the United States. If Francis A Shoup had fallen while leading his Confederate Battalions we would have lost a university president. But these were the ones who survived to live out their potential and life dreams. What of those who did not make it through? We must lament this day how many potential doctors, authors, college presidents, political leaders, clergymen, and inventors had their careers cut short during the horrible two days of Shiloh. Then multiply that by all of the battles and all of the wars in America's history and we begin to realize how staggering the toll: All in all 1 million deaths. Thus, it is right as we gather this morning that we remember, less we forget that war robs us of the flower of our nation.

Then there is Pentecost

You and I are not likely to get that excited in our worship service. But sometimes don't you wish we did? Oh, not in an emotional, showy sense. Many of us are turned off by mere emotionalism. To be honest sometimes I like when someone comes to Mass and gives me an AMEN.

WHEN PEOPLE FIRST MEET THE MASTER THEY HAVE THAT KIND OF EXCITEMENT. Studies in Church Growth reveal that the most enthusiastic members in most churches are the newest members. They have an enthusiasm and a willingness to serve that some people who have been around the church for a long time have somehow misplaced. That is one good reason for a church to keep reaching out. New people bring excitement into a church.

The popular sociologist and prominent Baptist minister, Harvey Cox, tells us that the only advice his father ever gave him concerning religion was, "Don't be a fanatic." It is amazing how uncomfortable we feel in the presence of someone who is really charged up about his or her faith. Yet there is something about a fresh experience of Christ that has that kind of effect on us.

If you and I are not as excited about the things of faith as we once were, perhaps it is because we are not as in touch as we once were with the source of our strength and power. When people first meet the Master, there is excitement. However, there is something else we need to see. We need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has not left us. The spirit the Church received at Pentecost is still in the Church and the Spirit we received at Confirmation is still in us. It is time for us to let the Spirit out.

Letting the Spirit out gives us Excitement. EXCITEMENT IS FED BY TAKING THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD OUTSIDE. When we meet Christ, it is an exciting experience. To keep that excitement alive, however, we need share that experience with someone else. E. Stanley Jones once compared faith to electricity. To be effective it must not be bottled up, but must be passed on. The scientific world is aglow right now with news about superconductors conductors that can transmit electricity with practically no resistance or loss. That is the ministry to which God is calling His people today. We are to be "superconductors" passing on His love, His joy, His peace with no resistance or loss.

There was a large church in the downtown of a large city, a beautiful structure. It had 4 stories. It was neoGothic with flying buttresses, a classic large church building. It had a very dignified, educated pastor and a wonderful choir of professional quality. The church practiced what one pastor described as a sort of "osmosis evangelism." They expected Christ to sort of "ooze" out of their fellowship into the world outside.

In the Narthex, the entry hallway to the church, they had a 10 feet tall marble statue of Christ with his arms outstretched. But times changed, people moved away, to the suburbs. The church declined. They couldn't keep the building up. It was hardly used. The Bishop considered closing it.

One night a fire broke out. Faulty wiring. The whole church went up in flames. Oak walls in the sanctuary, etc. were destroyed. The floor in the Narthex around the statue of Christ gave way and the statue went crashing to the floor of the basement. The next afternoon, after the fire department had doused the flames, workmen started to clean up and remove any surviving valuables. Then they were going to wreck what was left of the building for safety's sake. One of the workmen in the basement found the statue of Christ with hardly a mark on it, hardly a chip broken off. Gently they got a cable around it, lifted it out with a crane and set it on the sidewalk. Two businessmen were passing by. They looked at the ruins of the church and at the statue of Christ. One said sarcastically, "Well, looks like Jesus is all they got left." The other looked at the sight and said, "At least they got him out on the sidewalk where the people are."

Another thing that Church Growth experts have noticed is that growing churches are happy churches. There is something about the experience of taking Christ out on the sidewalk where the people are that does something for the morale of a congregation. Many more get caught up in their enthusiasm.

THIS IS TO SAY THAT THE KEYS TO AN EXCITING AND REWARDING LIFE ARE FAITH AND LOVE. Faith-meeting the Master. Love-sharing him with others.

Faith is more than learning a certain set of propositions. The life of faith is a life of positive expectancy. "I have met the Master. He will not fail me."

Story about a schoolteacher named Miss Thompson. Miss Thompson was a conscientious teacher who tried to treat all her students the same. There was one little boy, however, who was difficult for her even to like. His name was Teddy Stallard. Teddy didn't seem to be interested in school. He was not an attractive child, his schoolwork was horrendous and his attitude was no better. In short, there was certainly nothing loveable about Teddy Stallard. Indeed, for some strange reason, Miss Thompson felt a great deal of resentment toward Teddy. She almost enjoyed giving him "F's." There was something about him that rubbed her the wrong way.

Miss Thompson knew Teddy's background. His school records indicated that in the first grade he showed some promise but he had problems at home. In the second grade his mother fell seriously ill and Teddy started falling behind. In the third grade his mother died. Teddy was tabbed as a slow learner. In the fourth grade he was far behind. His teacher noted that his father had no interest in Teddy's progress. Miss Thompson knew Teddy's situation, but still there was something about him that she resented.

Christmas time came and the boys and girls in Miss Thompson's room brought her some gifts. To her surprise among those gifts was a very crudely wrapped present from Teddy. Opening it in front of the other children she discovered a gaudy rhinestone bracelet, with half the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume. Sensing that the other children were beginning to smirk and giggle at the simple gift, Miss Thompson had the presence of mind to put on the bracelet and open the perfume. She put some of the perfume on her wrist which she invited the children to smell. "Isn't this bracelet beautiful?" she asked the children. "Doesn't this perfume smell lovely?" Taking their cue from her the children responded with "oohs," and "aahs."

At the end of the school day, little Teddy came to Miss Thompson's desk and said, "Miss Thompson...Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother...and her bracelet looks real pretty on you, too. I'm glad you liked my presents."

When Teddy left, Miss Thompson got down on her knees and asked God for forgiveness for her attitude toward Teddy. To make a long story short, from that day forward Miss Thompson became a new teacher and Teddy Stallard became a new pupil. Both Teddy's attitude and his grades dramatically improved.

Many years later Miss Thompson received a letter from Teddy telling her that he would be graduating from high school second in his class. It was signed, "Love, Teddy Stallard." Four years later she received another letter from Teddy telling her that he was graduating from college first in his class. Four years later there was another letter to inform her that the young fellow

who once presented her with a gaudy bracelet with half the rhinestones missing and a cheap bottle of perfume was now Theodore Stallard, M.D. Also, he was getting married. His father was dead now, too. Would Miss Thompson be willing to sit where his mother would sit for the wedding if she were alive? "You are all the family I have left now," wrote Teddy. (2)

Miss Thompson sat proudly where Teddy's mother would have been seated for that wedding. That moment of sensitivity and compassion many years before had earned her that right. I am trying to say to you this morning that there are some very special people in this world. They are the luckiest people alive. They are enthusiastic, joyful people. They are characterized primarily by two attributes. They have faith a positive expectation about what God is going to do in their lives. And they have love. What they have received, they are willing to pass on to others

(1) We are indebted to the Rev. Keith Knight, pastor of the Keith Memorial United Methodist Church, Athens, Tennessee for three of the illustrations in this message.

(2) Tony Campolo, WHO SWITCHED THE PRICE TAGS? (Waco: Word Books, 1986).