

Chapter 13

Breathe on Me, Breath of God

"Do not quench the Spirit."

1 Thess 5:19

The Burning Mirror and Giant Windmills Image the Holy Spirit



In ancient times Archimedes built a giant solar reflector called the "burning mirror." It concentrated the sun's rays on Roman warships and set them afire. Primitive tribes used the sun to evaporate the ocean water they gathered in shallow pans, leaving salt behind. The coal and oil we use for energy comes from millions of years of converted sunlight. If 10,000 square miles of Arizona desert were covered with mirrors and the necessary boilers and turbines, it is estimated that America could double its electric power.

The wind also supplies us with energy. Wind powered the ships that brought Columbus to America and the pilgrims to Plymouth Rock. Old fashioned windmills used this free source of energy to grind wheat into flour. Today's scientists claim that armies of giant windmills in windswept areas like the Great Plains could produce one-fourth of our electrical needs.

The sun—that fire from the sky—provides us with phenomenal energy. The wind is a major energy source.

What are the images used to describe the manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? Fire and Wind. God gives us fire and wind for our physical needs. God gives us the Holy Spirit for our spiritual needs. The Spirit is our spiritual solar furnace. He is the divine breath that sweeps our souls clean of sin and makes us feel brand new with grace. The Spirit gives us seven gifts: wisdom, knowledge, understanding, courage, counsel, piety, fear of the Lord. These are divine, renewable sources of energy for our souls.

Is it true that the Spirit's work did not begin until New Testament times?

Some say

A. The Old Testament reports the saving work of the Father. The Gospels communicate the saving work of the Son. The Acts and Epistles proclaim the saving work of the Spirit. After Pentecost the visible action of the Spirit is constantly preached and experienced.

On Holy Thursday Jesus told the apostles he was sending them the Holy Spirit to remind them of all he had said and done and to help them understand the message of salvation more deeply. On Easter Sunday night, Jesus appeared to the apostles in the Upper Room. His first act was to breathe on them and give them the Spirit. "Peace be with you.... Receive the holy Spirit." (*Jn 20:21-22*)

Powered by the Spirit, the apostles went forth to create a Church. They became the first Christian missionaries. When they faced their first crisis about requiring gentile converts to follow Jewish laws of circumcision and diet, they turned to the Spirit for guidance. "The whole assembly fell silent...." (*Acts 15:12*) They silently begged the Spirit for help. The Spirit guided them to dispense gentiles from such laws and opened the mission of the Church to the whole world.

In these and dozens of other instances the power of the Spirit was evident in the explosive life of the early Church. It was the Spirit who gave them courage to speak boldly about Christ and face martyrdom rather than deny their faith. Read St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapters 12-14, for an account of the abundant gifts with which the Spirit endowed the Church.

B. *The Catechism Teaches...*

...that the Spirit was at work from the beginning of Creation and continues to act in this "Time of the Church."

In the divine plan of salvation, the Trinity is at work at all times. Revelation unveils the work of each person. The Father appears in the act of creation and the preparation for the Messiah. The Son is manifested in the fullness of time. The Spirit is revealed in the "time of the Church," between the Ascension of Christ and his Second Coming.

Nonetheless, the Spirit was secretly working in our creation and for our salvation from the beginning. The Old Testament uses the expression "breath" to hint at the action of the Spirit. The Father "breathes" into a lump of clay and creates Adam. Jesus later would "breathe" on the apostles to give them life. The Father tells Ezekiel

C *As Catholics We Believe...*
Our salvation from sin and our introduction into divine life and love is always a Trinitarian action, of Father, Son and Spirit. The visible manifestation of this saving action took place in stages, corresponding to our creation, history and readiness for such revelation in mind and heart. The three stages of salvation history are (1) preparation for the messiah; (2) the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; (3) the "time of the Church" which is our own era that stretches from Christ's ascension to his second coming. It is in this third period that we see most clearly the action of the Holy Spirit.

We should be conscious of the Spirit's presence in our hearts, moving us to pray, to witness Jesus to our families, friends and the world, to be lights of divine love, compassion and forgiveness wherever the world is dark.

Reflection

"All of us who have received one and the same Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit, are in a sense blended together with one another and with God. For if Christ, together with the Father's and his own Spirit, comes to dwell in each of us, though we are many, still the Spirit is one and undivided. He binds together the spirits of each and everyone of us,...and makes all appear as one in him. For just as the power of Christ's sacred flesh unites those in whom it dwells into one body, I think that in the same way the one and undivided Spirit of God, who dwells in all, leads all into spiritual unity."

St. Cyril of Alexandria,⁹⁹ *Catechism*, 738

In My Life

1. While I know the disadvantages of sun exposure on my skin, I am also aware of the sun's essential value to life on earth. What are some of those values? How could the sun's creative force image for me the Holy Spirit's positive contributions to my personal life?
2. The Bible uses the image of breath and wind to describe the life-giving work of the Spirit. What do I see in breath and wind which helps me appreciate how the Spirit works in me?
3. Read *1 Corinthians 12-14*. Which gifts of the Spirit do I pray for? Which ones work in me? In Chapter 13, I read of the many ways the Spirit's gift of love appears. What must I do to internalize these many paths to love?

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

Galatians, 5:22

Prayer

Come Holy Spirit and fill me with your seven gifts: wisdom, knowledge, understanding, courage, counsel, piety and fear of the Lord. Let each gift shape my conscience and drive away the seven deadly sins of pride, jealousy, anger, lust, sloth, gluttony and greed. Renew me at every moment of the rest of my life.

Glossary

Charism—A scriptural term used to describe God's gifts, especially the Spirit's gifts outlined in *1 Cor 12-14*.

Paraclete—In *John 16:7*, Jesus calls the Spirit the Advocate or Paraclete, referring to the Spirit's work of convincing us of our sinfulness, convicting us of it, converting us from sin and consoling us in the process.

to invoke the four winds to bring life to the valley of dry bones. "From the four winds come, O spirit, and breathe into these slain that they may come to life." (Ez 37:9)

This text indirectly refers to the Holy Spirit.

1. What is the mission of the Spirit?

"The One whom the Father has sent into our hearts, the Spirit of his Son, is truly God⁴⁷...When the Father sends his Word, he always sends his Breath...."

"The mission of the Spirit of adoption is to unite them to Christ and make them live in him...." *Catechism, 689, 690*

2. In what areas of Church life do we see the Spirit?

- In the Scriptures he inspired;
- In the Tradition, to which the Church Fathers are always timely witnesses;
- In the Church's Magisterium, which he assists;
- In the sacramental liturgy, through its words and symbols, in which the Holy Spirit puts us into communion with Christ;
- In prayer, wherein he intercedes for us;
- In the charisms and ministries by which the Church is built up;
- In the signs of apostolic and missionary life;
- In the witness of saints through whom he manifests his holiness and continues the work of salvation." *Catechism, 688*

3. How does the Spirit care for us?

"Through the Holy Spirit we are restored to paradise, led back to

the Kingdom of heaven, and adopted as children, given confidence to call God 'Father' and to share in Christ's grace, called children of light and given a share in eternal glory."⁴⁸

Catechism, 736



*The Descent
of the Holy Spirit
upon Mary and the Apostles*