

# Novena Booklet

Novena of  
Reflection & Prayer  
in Preparation for

# Pentecost

Friday May 22nd to Saturday May 30th 2020

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WALKING THE PATH TO PENTECOST

WALKING THE PATH TO PENTECOST





## Day 1 - Friday May 22<sup>nd</sup>

Where the Spirit is there is creation and new life.

Where the Spirit is, there is the living Christ.

The Spirit is the breath of God's creative love,

so that whoever lives in the Spirit

lives in the ever newness of God

(Sr Ilia Delio OSF)

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was a formless void and the breath (spirit) of God swept over the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light and there was light." (Gen 1:1-2)*

Our upbringing furnishes us with mental models that inform our outlook and help us to negotiate life's difficulties and questions. These models or maps are a way of organising the things we know into useful information that we can call upon when needed. This is also true of our religious upbringing. So, it may be that as we approach Pentecost we think of the Spirit as something given on some wonderful once off occasion, 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus, a gift that that gave rise to the community of faith called Church. We may also associate it with our confirmation and the seven gifts of the Spirit that were poured out on a given day. However, such a perspective is quite limiting especially when we consider that in the Scriptures the movement of the Spirit of God is not restricted to a particular feast, day or time. In the Bible the Spirit or breath of God (ruah) is an expression of the activity of the utterly mysterious Other, the Creator who causes everything to be and who sustains all that exists. That this is so is subtly expressed in the beautiful opening words of Genesis. According to some experts in Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, it would be perfectly acceptable to read those words as: "When God began to create the heavens and the earth..." In other words what is put before us is not a one-off moment that occurred "in the beginning" but a rather a process, a process that is a breathing (inspiration) of the breath of God. What that means is then expressed symbolically in the first outcome of the creative activity of God who breathes "Let there be Light!" The mystic who wrote Genesis 1 intuited that when we contemplate creation and ourselves in it, we are somehow drawn to the mystery of God, the source of Light and all that is good. Perhaps this is what the writer of Psalm 36 has also grasped when he, considering the gift around him gave voice to this prayer:

*How precious is your steadfast love, O God!*

*All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.*

*They feast on the abundance of your house*

*and you give them drink from the river of your delights.*

*For with you is the fountain of life; In your light we see light. (Ps 36:7-9).*

(Pause for reflection)

Creator God,

Fill us with your creative Spirit

that we may learn to contemplate

with wonder and gratitude

the world in which we live and on which we depend.

Let it speak to us of you and the movement of your Spirit

through which you renew the face of the earth

everyday. AMEN



## Day Two - Saturday May 23rd

Where the Spirit is there is creation and new life.

Where the Spirit is, there is the living Christ.

The Spirit is the breath of God's creative love,  
so that whoever lives in the Spirit  
lives in the ever newness of God

*"Take courage for I am with you, says the Lord..., my Spirit  
abides among you, do not fear."*

(Haggai 2:4)

The Bible isn't so much a book as a small library, written and compiled over centuries by people who simply wanted to pass on their experience of faith. It is helpful to remember this when considering the Spirit in the Scriptures because in the different books, written at different times and in different styles the authors were not all simply repeating the same thing about God or the Spirit. Sometimes, they spoke to God (as in the Psalms) but often they were sharing with each other a word of hope or encouragement (as in the prophets). In this quotation from the Prophet Haggai, writing around the year 520 BC, a despondent people who have been through the ravages of war and exile are being encouraged not to be afraid to start over, to make a new beginning and to rebuild the Temple of God in Jerusalem. In their history as the people of God they found different ways to acknowledge that the God of Hosts, the Creator of all, Yahweh their Lord was with them. A primary focus was the Temple, but he was also with them through their anointed king and bound to them through covenant. Now on their return from exile there is no temple, they have no king and they fear the covenant is in tatters. Yet among them is a prophet who feels compelled to remind them of the core of their identity: trust in the faithfulness of God. His presence is not limited to places or institutions, however holy, it is the breath or Spirit of God that gives them life – this is their reason for being, their hope for the future so there is no need for fear.

Can this prophetic word speak to the year to us in 2020, and to a world on its knees because of an epidemic that has brought death, fear and uncertainty? Yes, we believe that the breath of God is the reason why something exists rather than nothing. God is the source of all and abides in creation through his Spirit. This is the same Spirit that compelled Jesus to proclaim God's reign and that raised him from death to new life in the resurrection. This is the Spirit we invoke this Pentecost, a Spirit to heal us and raise us up.

*Our hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts  
through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Rom. 5:3-5)*

(Pause for reflection)

God of Presence, with us here and now,  
through your abiding Spirit, open our minds and hearts  
to learn from the times we are living through.  
May the hard lessons of these days teach us  
how to prepare for a better tomorrow  
in which the peoples of the earth  
share their gifts for the well-being of all.  
Take away our fear of the future  
and gives us courage to rebuild our world as  
the temple of your Presence. Amen



### Day Three - Sunday May 24<sup>th</sup>

Where the Spirit is there is creation and new life.

Where the Spirit is, there is the living Christ.

The Spirit is the breath of God's creative love,  
so that whoever lives in the Spirit  
lives in the ever newness of God

*A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezek. 36:26)*

The world's first heart transplant performed by Dr Christian Barnard in 1967 caused a sensation at the time as people marvelled at the advancement in medical science that allowed for such an operation. Dr Barnard and his team had learned how to remove a deeply defective heart and replace it with a healthy one. The prophet Ezekiel writing some two and half thousand years earlier had something very different, but no less remarkable, in mind when he shared his understanding of what God wanted to do for his people. Ezekiel had been a priest in the Jerusalem Temple. He lived through the war and siege that led to its destruction and was numbered among those taken into exile by the victorious Babylonian army. He knew what it was to live with a broken heart, what it is to feel lost, without roots, and even abandoned. Yet still, while mired in circumstances he would never have chosen for himself, he came to a new understanding of God at work in his life. In the midst of the mayhem he perceived that God wanted to heal his people and would do this by fixing what was wrong with them. He would give them a new heart. In the Bible the heart is the seat of understanding. Their grasp of God had become skewed and was distorted, they had failed to hear and respond to his invitation to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly in his way. Now, however, their faithful God would have them come to know him again, he would breathe new life into them. This life would come from his Spirit and it would give them new heart. So once again we find that in the Scripture the Spirit's role is to create, to recreate, to make new. Through the mission of Jesus, we have come to learn that God will always meet us where we are and that is where he begins the work of forming us anew. At times, this may feel like heart surgery without anaesthetic, but we also know through Jesus that the divine healer can be trusted.

*I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and have done this, says the LORD."*  
(Ezek. 37:14)

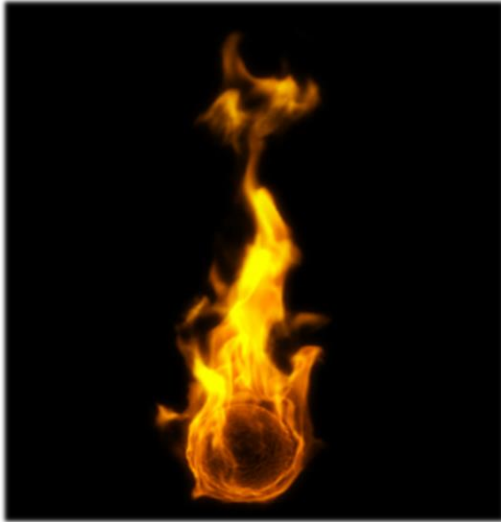
(Pause for reflection)

Healing God reach out to us now  
and make us well.

Heal our hearts and the hearts we have hurt  
by our faithlessness and neglect.

Through the gift of your Spirit awaken us  
to the new life you offer,  
rooted in your compassion, justice and love,  
so that we may become instruments of your healing goodness.  
We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen





#### Day Four - Monday May 25<sup>th</sup>

Where the Spirit is there is creation and new life.

Where the Spirit is, there is the living Christ.

The Spirit is the breath of God's creative love,  
so that, whoever lives in the Spirit  
lives in the ever newness of God

*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. (Isa. 42:1-3)*

The person spoken about in this quotation from Isaiah is referred to as God's "servant" but is nowhere named. His life, his relationship with God and his experience of suffering are reflected upon in a series of poems known as the "Servant's Songs" that are found in this section of the Book of Isaiah. Some five hundred years later, in the first century when the early Christians were thinking about Jesus and reflecting on his life, they found that the poems easily resonated with all they knew of him. The Gospels all agree that the Spirit came down on Jesus, was with Jesus, drove Jesus, filled Jesus. The Spirit they spoke of was the Spirit they knew from their Scriptures, the powerful, creative prophetic Spirit of God. That Spirit rested on Jesus and inspired his entire ministry and it was the source of his faithfulness to God's will for humanity expressed in the image of the Kingdom. This was a Spirit of compassion that moved him to reach out to those on the margins, those judged and rejected by society. A Spirit of justice that led him to confront oppression and hypocrisy and a Spirit of forgiveness that embraced the sinner. This same Spirit, a power from on high, raised Jesus from the dead and was poured out on his followers as they responded to his call to become witnesses of what God has done, is doing and will continue to do. Through this Spirit we dare to believe that God delights in us as he delighted in his Son.

*Just at this time Jesus, filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, said, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it has pleased you to do. (Lk.10:21)*

Giver of the Spirit,  
Your people are burdened and afraid.  
We have fallen victim to a virus that  
has turned our world on its head.  
We are vulnerable now and wondering  
what you are asking of us.  
Through your gentle Spirit  
teach us to look again to the life of your Son,  
that we may learn from him  
what it means to live in the Spirit,  
and be faithful to you. Amen



## Day Five - Tuesday May 26<sup>th</sup>

Where the Spirit is there is creation and new life.  
Where the Spirit is, there is the living Christ.  
The Spirit is the breath of God's creative love,  
so that, whoever lives in the Spirit  
lives in the ever newness of God

*Jesus said to Nicodemus, "What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (Jn. 3:6-8)*

This is the second time in the Gospel of John that we hear mention of the Spirit of God. The first time, John the Baptist announces that he has seen the Spirit descend and remain on Jesus. Now it is spoken of by Jesus who wants to explain to Nicodemus, a learned and holy man, that God cannot be boxed in or reduced to formulas and definitions. When it comes to religion the big temptation for believers is to divide the world into those who love God and those who don't, those who are saved and those who are not. Nicodemus is falling into this trap and Jesus uses the language of the Spirit as breath to suggest to him that perhaps he should look at the world in another way. For Jesus, being born from above means learning to see the world the way God sees it. As we know from the Book of Genesis "God saw all that he had made and indeed it was very good" (Gen 1:31). This did not change with the sin of Adam, the world is God's world, human beings are still made in his image, we are blessed. The difficulty for us is that we make divisions, we see from below or in a worldly way with the eyes of the "flesh" and we divide life into the sacred and the profane because we think either that's how God made it or that's what sin has done to it. We may put a lot of effort into living in the sacred world and avoiding the profane. Yet there is only one world, and it is the Spirit that moves us to see this. The breath of God moves in ways that we cannot manipulate or control. In and through all the ups and downs of our daily human struggles the Spirit points us towards the creator God who offers us life. Sadly, we can and sometimes do choose to live otherwise, as though we were just born of "the flesh" and living in a world other than the one made by God.

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. (Ps. 51:10-11)*

(Pause for reflection)

Lord Jesus, teacher and friend  
guide us towards trust  
in the movement of your Spirit,  
to an openness to this mysterious breath  
that is the guarantee of your abiding presence  
with us each day,  
You who are the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen



## Day Six - Wednesday May 27<sup>th</sup>

Where the Spirit is there is creation and new life.

Where the Spirit is, there is the living Christ.

The Spirit is the breath of God's creative love,  
so that, whoever lives in the Spirit  
lives in the ever newness of God

*Jesus stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

*And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "**Today** this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Lk. 4:16-21)*

This is how Luke, writing several decades after the first Easter, chooses to begin his account of the public ministry of Jesus. It is the Sabbath, a day to contemplate the creative and saving work of God as mandated by the Scriptures. People are gathered and ready to listen to the Word of God as they do every week. They bring with them the story of their lives; their hopes, their joys, their sorrows, their fears and their sins. They bring with them the fragile faith that they cling to in a world that seems not to care. Jesus looks into their hearts and shares with them a word that they need to hear. It is a word about the faithfulness of God who cares about the poor, the blind and all those oppressed by systems and attitudes that leave them downtrodden. It is a word they have heard before, so now they wait to see what light Jesus can shed on it. He simply affirms that this faithful God is here now, accomplishing his word through the gift of the Spirit. Luke's intention here is not merely to record what may have happened one day in a synagogue in Nazareth rather he is sharing the faith of the early Church that that every time the community gathers to commemorate the Lord's day the word is fulfilled in our hearing. The God of the Scriptures is not asking us just to believe in past events so that we might earn a future reward. No, the risen Christ calls us to contemplate **today** how the word is fulfilled in our hearing, his Spirit filled community gathers because **today** God is willing us to live the power of the Spirit in our midst that we may share the Good News of God with the world.

*He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.  
The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. (Jn. 3:34-35)*

(Pause for Reflection)

Come Holy Spirit  
and open up the word of God for us,  
that we may find there  
our hope, our courage and our joy.  
Through a faith filled sharing of the word  
may we become more authentic witnesses  
of the transforming power of your love so that  
the whole world may join  
in the praise of our liberator God. AMEN







## Day Eight - Friday May 29<sup>th</sup>

Where the Spirit is there is creation and new life.

Where the Spirit is, there is the living Christ.

The Spirit is the breath of God's creative love,  
so that, whoever lives in the Spirit  
lives in the ever newness of God

*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. (Jn. 20:19-22)*

In the Gospel of John the encounter with the Risen Lord and the Gift of the Spirit and are celebrated together, we have Easter and Pentecost on the same day! John wants us to understand that the gift of the Spirit is the fruit of the resurrection. Christ risen bestows on us his peace, breathes on us his Spirit and sends us just as he was sent by the Father. The whole mystery of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is compacted together in these few verses and we are brought to the overwhelming realisation that God chooses to mission us just as he missioned his son. John's Gospel makes it very clear why the Father sent his Son – it was because he so loved the world. In Jesus, the Word made flesh, the world comes to know who God is and Jesus does this by inviting people to come to faith in him which is the same as trusting in him. The signs he performs all point to the presence with us of a God who loves us, heals us, nourishes us, and raises us up. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all: this is what Jesus shows us and this is what we in turn are invited to share with the world. In the Gospel of John, we are made to understand that the only way we can do this is by being one with him, - "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." (Jn.15:5). It is the gift of the Spirit that makes this union possible and it is in the power of this Spirit that we are sent. Without the Spirit our Christian faith is just another religion, a set of rules, or a collection of dogmas. However, in the Spirit it becomes a word of life for the world.

*Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the LORD of hosts. (Zech. 4:6)*

(Pause for reflection)

Word made flesh

And splendour of the Father,  
you are the light of the world.

As you change water to wine  
you invite us to celebrate God's joy in us  
As you go on bended knee to wash our feet  
you show us the way of the Father's humble love.

Through the gift of your Spirit  
May we live as true servants of your word  
so that the world may come to know that  
We too are sent by the Father. Amen



## Day Nine - Saturday May 30<sup>th</sup>

Where the Spirit is there is creation and new life.

Where the Spirit is, there is the living Christ.

The Spirit is the breath of God's creative love,  
so that, whoever lives in the Spirit  
lives in the ever newness of God

*You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame. Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. (Joel 2:27-29)*

When Luke wants to give a context for the gift of the Spirit he finds it in the liturgy of the Jewish people. The Feast of Pentecost was celebrated 50 days after Passover and it marked the completion of God's saving work in bringing the chosen people out of slavery in Egypt. On Pentecost the Jews celebrate the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. This is the gift by which they entered into a covenant with their liberator God. This is the teaching that would form them into the people of God. Sadly, we translate this word as Law as if it were just about commandments – it is much more than that, it is a guide for life. So now, when Luke wants to help his readers understand the gift of the Spirit and the birth of the new people of God living a new covenant he speaks of Pentecost. He depicts Peter in his great Pentecost speech quoting a dynamic and visionary text from the prophet Joel who dared to imagine a new day when God's Spirit would be freely given to all. The outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh points to a new creation when everyone is inspired to recognise that God is in their midst, that we are all invited to play our part in realising God's dream for the world. Joel's vision has come to pass through Jesus' faithful proclamation of the Reign of God, his death and his resurrection. It is his Spirit that is poured out, this is the power from on high that he promised and it transforms our understanding of God and empowers us to live fully this Good News, the Gospel of the universal love of God. In this time of pandemic when a spirit of fear and anxiety has seized the world let us join together on Pentecost invoking the Spirit of God and drawing inspiration from Pope Francis' words when he describes beautifully the consequences of this Pentecost vision.:

“We love this beautiful planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses. The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters.”  
(Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel)

(Pause for Reflection)

Come Holy Spirit  
Fill the hearts of your faithful'  
Enkindle in them the fire of your love.  
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.  
And You shall renew the face of the earth.





We pray for all those in our country and throughout the world suffering from the Corona Virus.

May its victims and their families be strengthened by the support of our community of faith and restored soon to full health. We also pray for our leaders and medical personnel who deal with the virus.

May we keep calm and may we join together in solidarity with care and compassion to tackle this emergency.

This we ask in confidence through Christ Our Lord. Amen