

Acts 2:1-21, Psalm 104:25-32, 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13, John 20:19-23

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.”

I love the story of Pentecost for its drama. It’s an exciting story, with miracles and pyrotechnics! I’ve always loved it because I love languages and I love that the miracle of Pentecost was people being able to speak many languages. And I love the tongues “as of fire” appearing on the disciples’ heads, because I feel a certain kinship with anyone who looks like their hair might be on fire.

I love Pentecost for its drama. But I also struggle with the drama of Pentecost. The miracles, the sudden undeniable certainty for the disciples that they had received the promised Holy Spirit. I struggle because for myself, and probably for many of us, discerning the presence of the Holy Spirit is not quite so easy and clear.

We all receive the Holy Spirit, or to borrow St. Paul’s phrase, which I love, “we were all made to *drink* of one Spirit.” We are sealed with the Holy Spirit in baptism. We are strengthened by the Holy Spirit at Confirmation. Even if you are not baptised, the Holy Spirit of God is always near you, because God is near you, and He does not wait for baptism to begin relationship or communication with us. But what does all that mean? What is the Holy Spirit, anyway?

The Holy Spirit is God. The Spirit is not a part of God – God is one – a unity. The language the early Christians used to speak of the Trinity arose from their various experiences of God. And they spoke of the Holy Spirit when they described how they felt God’s presence with them, even after God in human form – Jesus – had ascended into heaven. So the Holy Spirit is God, present with you. The Holy Spirit is how we experience the presence of God today, with and within us.

So where in our own lives do we detect the presence of the Holy Spirit with us and within us? How do we recognize God’s presence in us, if it is not always as dramatic as it was in the Pentecost story? What does God the Holy Spirit *feel like* inside us?

I would like to suggest three ways that we might feel or detect the presence of the Holy Spirit within ourselves. 1) Spiritually or emotionally, through a sense of God’s presence. 2) Physically, through our life itself, and 3) Mentally, through faith.

Have you ever felt the presence of God within you? Have you listened for, looked for, or sensed His presence? What did it feel like, in that moment when you recognized God? Or what might it feel like, if you don’t think you’ve had that experience?

It might feel like a fire – a burning, an energy, a heat of passion within your heart. A passion for life, or for God, or for others around you that’s intense, and somehow sacred.

Or it might feel like a sensation - an awareness - of joy inside you. A love for life and delight in the world that God has created. Joy might seem to flood your being with a moment of thankfulness, and that is a sign of the presence of God.

Or the presence of God might feel like an energy, almost a restlessness, that makes it hard for you to sit still or sit quietly when you see injustice or cruelty. An energy that pushes you to counter indifference or hatred with love.

It was funny as I thought of these possible sensations of the presence of God how much they were tied to feelings – to emotions. Passion, love, joy, restlessness. But these feelings are really the signs, the indicators of God’s presence, like the movement of a weather vane is the sign of the presence of wind. Our spiritual life is intimately connected to our

emotional life, and so often it is these feelings, these movements of the heart, that help us detect the spiritual movements and presence of God. That is one way we can feel the Spirit's presence.

But even if you struggle to think of a time when you felt God's presence like that, or you worry that you haven't had those kind of spiritual, pious feelings, or maybe you feel like you have, but you worry that you could possibly have imagined them, there are other ways to detect God's presence.

Here's another one: the Holy Spirit *is life*. The Spirit of God is breath - "the breath of God". The Book of Genesis speaks of the Spirit when it tells how God "breathed" life into the first humans - and God breathes life into every human.

In fact, the word "Spirit" itself literally means "breath". In the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament, the words for the Spirit are *ruach* and *pneuma*, which both mean "breath". The word "spirit" feels a little more abstract in English, but actually it comes from the word "breath", too. From the Latin word *spiro* - to breathe - from which we also get the word "respiration".

God breathes the breath of life into us. Our life, our breath, is the breath of God. The Spirit of God is within us every moment, sustaining us every day that we live and breathe. God is with us minute by minute as we breathe in and breathe out.

So if you "feel" nothing else of God's presence, remember that. You can feel your own breath, which is real and tangible and certain - not imagined! And then you know that God is with you, sustaining your life every second that you breathe. Even when you can't muster any other thought or feeling or word for God in prayer, you can always sit, and breathe, and reflect on the breath of God, the Spirit of God, the gift of life within you and within us all. A physical presence of God.

And finally one more. A mental way of detecting God. St. Paul tells us today in his letter to the Corinthians - "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."

I think maybe we should avoid the "magical" kind of thought that this is some kind of incantation. That anyone, no matter what they believe or think, channels the Holy Spirit just by saying the words "Jesus is Lord".

But, to *confess* that Jesus is Lord. To say it with our lips and believe it in our hearts - Paul says this is yet another sign of the presence of the Spirit within us. Because the Spirit of God makes faith possible. And so any moment of faith, any flutter of belief, any glimmer of hope - those are God! That is also what God feels like within us.

These are just a few of the ways we may detect the Holy Spirit - the presence of God with and in us. There are many others. The Spirit gives us many gifts to love and serve God and the world, and these gifts are also signs of God's presence.

So any time you find in yourself the capacity to do some service for the good of the Church or the world, to teach, or speak, or love, or lend a hand, that is also what God feels like. These are also signs of the presence of God.

And one last thing in closing. When we look at the stories of the coming of the Holy Spirit, they share a theme. In the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, we hear Jesus promise to "clothe us with power from on high" so that we can be witnesses throughout the world. In the Gospel of John which we read today, just before breathing the Spirit on them, Jesus tells His disciples "as the Father has sent me, so I send you."

The Holy Spirit is all bound up in mission. We receive the Spirit and experience the Spirit so that we can be sent - as missionaries and proclaimers God's love. As examples of the joy and love that comes from knowing the presence of God. And so whenever you feel the Spirit - whenever you experience God - you are called and you are sent to share the joy and the love and the Good News, and to be a witness to God's presence in the world.

Amen.