

IN THE UNITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Have you ever noticed that, in the New Roman Missal, nearly every Collect (opening prayer) of the Mass concludes with those words? With only one exception (the prayer immediately before the Sign of Peace), every prayer we say at Mass is directed to the Father, and the Collect ends with: *Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.*

The Holy Spirit, whose sending by Jesus is celebrated on this Pentecost day, has a number of roles in the lives of believers. The Spirit provides us with the gifts we need in order to proclaim Jesus to the world: wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord – though I still prefer the Vatican II correction on the last one: wonder and awe in God’s presence. And the Spirit, as St. Paul teaches, *helps us to pray as we ought* when our own words fall short or when selfishness might lead us to pray only for what we want rather than for what God knows we truly need.

But the powerful role of the Spirit that tends to be neglected is the **unity** the Spirit promises and wishes to create – not just for us, but for the Holy Trinity! As our liturgical prayers imply, it is the Spirit who is the principle of unity between the Father and the Son. In trying to unravel the mystery of the Trinity, some theologians have suggested that the Spirit is spontaneously “ignited” in the immensity of love between the Father and the Son. It’s not that the Spirit is somehow secondary in relation to the first two Persons of the Trinity because the Triune God is without beginning or without end. But for all eternity, that unimaginable love of Father and Son is so powerful that it generates the third person of the Trinity who is the bond of unity among them. It always gives me a headache just trying to comprehend all that because human language is simply inadequate when attempting to explain such an immense mystery.

In the unity of the Holy Spirit.... Whenever we gather for prayer as a Church community, that truth is at the center of who we are and what we do. We are called to be “of one heart and one mind”, as St. Paul would put it, in expressing and living our faith. Our lives as believers are meant to mirror the unity that binds Father, Son and Spirit. And we, in turn, are called to seed the world with the unity the Spirit wishes to create among us. The great Priestly Prayer of Jesus related in St. John’s account of the Last Supper asks the Father to make the disciples of Jesus one “as we are one” so that “the world may believe that you sent me.” Those are Jesus’ final words to his disciples and his most heartfelt prayer for them – and for us.

We have only to read the paper, watch the news, or see what goes on in social media to appreciate our world’s desperate need for unity. On this Pentecost day, we should pray for the Spirit to enlighten us with all the gifts we need to live in such a way that our unity as believers will, little by little, inspire and transform our world.

Fr. Bob