

Singing Our Faith
5th Sunday of Easter – April 29, 2018

Come Down, O Love Divine



1. Come down, O Love di - vine, Seek now this soul of
2. O let it free - ly burn, Till earth - ly pas - sions
3. And so the yearn - ing strong, With which the soul will



mine, And vis - it it with your own ar - dor glow - ing;
turn To dust and ash - es in its heat con - sum - ing;
long, Shall far out - pass the pow'r of hu - man tell - ing;



O Com - fort - er, draw near, With - in my heart ap -
And let your glo - rious light Shine ev - er on my
No soul can guess Love's grace Till it be - come the



pear, And kin - dle it, your ho - ly flame be - stow - ing.
sight, And clothe me round, the while my path il - lum - ing.
place Where - in the Ho - ly Spir - it makes a dwell - ing.

Text: *Discendi, Amor Santo*; Bianco da Siena, d.1434; tr. by Richard F. Littledale, 1833–1890
Tune: DOWN AMPNEY, 66 11 D; Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872–1958

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Throughout the Easter season, the first reading is taken from the Acts of the Apostles, written by St. Luke the Evangelist. This book begins with a concise sequence of events that occurred after the resurrection. After the first couple chapters, the writings focus on the apostles spreading the faith. These same guys who abandoned Jesus at the crucifixion were, just soon after that, healing the lame, spreading the gospel, instructing boldly, and doing so with zeal and courage. The apostles' gifts came from the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Church grew only through the power of the Holy Spirit, as we're reminded at the end of Sunday's first reading – *“The church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was at peace. It was being built up and walked in the fear of the Lord, and with the consolation of the Holy Spirit it grew in numbers.”*

We're at the halfway point in our celebration of the Easter season, with Pentecost coming just three weeks from Sunday! As we continue to hear about the spreading of the faith by the apostles, we're hopefully inspired to do the same. Our opening hymn invokes the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and make Christ the center of all we do.

The hymn “Come Down, O Love Divine” is still relatively new to our parish. Learning it is a worthwhile investment – its text is a work of art, its tune has a very noble quality. The hymn tune “Down Ampney” was written by English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams. Most hymn tunes get their names from people or places, as does this one. Down

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Ampney is a small village in Gloucestershire, England where Vaughan Williams was born. The text is taken from an Italian hymn, “Discendi, amor santo,” by the 15th century mystic Bianco da Siena. The original is in the form of a *laude*, a sacred song written in the vernacular - hence, Italian, not Latin. It was translated into English in 1867 by R.F. Littledale.

The first stanza poetically invokes the Holy Spirit, asking Him to dwell within us. The second stanza goes further, asking the fire of the Spirit to turn our worldliness to ashes. I find the “zapping” of earthy passions especially symbolic - “Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” The second stanza goes on to recall images of our baptism when we are clothed with Christ and declared a child of Light - “And clothe me round, the while my path illuming.” All of us can recall a time when our faith wasn’t a priority for whatever reason. To contrast, we know how much better our life is with God at the center. And that’s what the last line of the hymn is getting at - “No soul can guess Love’s Grace till it become the place...” Like the twelve apostles, we can’t fathom the power of the Holy Spirit until we make room for Him in our heart. Amazing things can and will happen if we let the Spirit guide us.

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