

### *The Wind Bloweth Where it Listeth*

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, when Christ fulfilled His oft-repeated promise to send forth the Spirit of God upon the Church. It was a momentous day for those who were gathered in Jerusalem, not only because of the promise, but also because the event had been prophesied centuries before. Under the influence of that same Spirit, the apostle Peter, who only moments before had been a very different man, preached the first sermon of the Christian Church:

*Acts 2:14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: 15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. 16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; 17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: 18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy...*

How does the Holy Spirit do His work? This will prove instructive of what we may expect of Him today. Returning to a familiar scene from the Gospels in John chapter three, we find Jesus speaking with Nicodemus, *a man of the Pharisees and a ruler of the Jews*. This learned man received a session of instruction one night from a little known rabbi which probably remained with him as an unforgettable memory:

*Jn 3:5b-8 Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit,, said Jesus, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. 9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?*

Indeed, how *can* these things be?! Think of Jesus' use of the wind as a metaphor of the Spirit. This notion should not have been foreign to Nicodemus, as the Hebrew word for *wind* and *spirit* are the same: *ruach*. The wind blows, and we cannot see it. We can certainly feel it, and its effects are not hard to see. We need only look at the trees, or the ocean, stirred up by a storm, or the vast blades of power-generating windmills. But the wind itself remains invisible. It can be known only by its consequences.

Being placed in a realm where there is an unseen agent at work that we can neither control nor anticipate nor contain represents a challenge to our faculties and reason, and places us on very uncomfortable ground. Jesus' lesson on the Spirit had to be kept at a kindergarten level for Nicodemus, who should have been more advanced in his understanding. The Lord upbraided the proud teacher: *10b: Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? 11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our*

*witness. 12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?* If Nicodemus had been ready to hear it, perhaps Jesus would have explained to Him that the wind metaphor is only good up until a certain point. The Spirit is a Person, with a mind and will, and cannot be harnessed, like the wind. And there are other differences. We can shelter ourselves from the wind, but the Spirit knows no barriers. The effects of the Spirit are not seen upon material objects, but in the lives of men. So profound is its transforming power that it can even cause them to be spiritually reborn.

Let's return to the Book of Acts. Following Pentecost, the influences of the Spirit became more and more evident as the Gospel was preached from town to town, province to province, nation to nation. Working through the Apostles, He performed miracles that were intended to confirm the message of salvation that was being declared. There was always the element of surprise. No prediction was of any use. He directed Paul to one area to evangelize, and forbade him to enter another, offering no explanation. He fell upon devout Gentiles to the amazement of Jewish believers, who were convinced that there was no place for Gentiles in the community of God. He was truly an unknown, unseen force let loose upon the world, and the results were made manifest in the most unusual ways.

Now all of this intrigues me when I consider the implications for us today. We must also assume that the Holy Spirit, like the wind, will *bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth*. God's actions through and in the Church will take forms that we cannot anticipate. But I need to remain ready for them. I must work against my penchant for security, comfort, and the same-old-same-old.

I suspect that He will make Himself known through ordinary circumstances that He transforms into the extraordinary. For example, last night I received a phone call from a long-time, dear friend, a man with many difficult personal issues due to health problems. He will never enjoy, more than likely, anything like a normal life. His brief periods of stability are punctuated by periods of disruption that throw any tentative plans he may make into complete disarray. He has a thousand dreams, the same ones he has had for twenty years, and the vast majority of them will never be realized, at least in this life. What did his call do? It interrupted my own rather desperate plans for the evening. I thought I had no time, and now I *really* had no time. But I knew that I couldn't listen to him halfheartedly, pretending to give him ear while I tapped away at the computer. I knew that the Lord expected me to devote prime attention to his needs. Was this the Holy Spirit? I think so. And by my efforts to cooperate, He was able to work through me, I hope, on my friend's behalf. And the Gospel, on a small scale, and in a personal way, was being preached.

Will He work through my efforts to minister to hospice patients, providing me with insights into hurting lives, or even just the necessary presence, to meet the unique needs represent-

ed in each encounter? That's what I'm counting on. It too is a surprising work. Most of the consequences may remain unknown to me, at least for now. But I can proceed with the confidence that when I am attendant upon anything to which He has called me, there *will* be a significance entailed that passes human understanding. *The wind bloweth where it listeth.*

Do you look for the work of the Holy Spirit in your life? Are you tempted to assume that day-to-day encounters are too mundane to deserve such an expectation? Think again. This is precisely the platform upon which He chooses to perform His extraordinary deeds. Perhaps we are looking too hard for something other than that which God places right before our faces. If it always had to be some special, noteworthy, exalted occasion, His occasions to reveal Himself would be few and far between. If each of us is treating life as if it were a vehicle of opportunity for God's Spirit, our influence would far exceed the apparent. And if we are exercising this kind of faith in the power of God within our present circumstances, I am sure that He will enlarge our borders and increase our ministry. We don't need to look any further for outreach than this.

*And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.* What for? For them, it meant a specific mission that would move forward step by step, bit by bit, under the sovereign guidance of the unseen Spirit of God.. And for us? This very day it could be the joy of a life shared with loved ones, or church friends, or with the workaday world, in which the ordinary will be miraculously transformed by God's Spirit whose boundless, ever new ways are no less operative than they ever were. Hindsight alone will reveal the extent of what He has accomplished among us.

We need not wait any longer, tarrying in Jerusalem in the upper room. Pentecost has already come. The Church has already received its blessing.

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*