



Pentecost

THE NEW SHOFAR

Come Holy Spirit, fire up within us!

Pentecost is a heavenly gift for bring God to the world

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful

This prayer to the Holy Spirit is my favourite, one I learned decades ago and still use daily and in just about every Church gathering in which I am asked to pray. It says so much about the great feast we celebrate today. One of the truly powerful elements of the prayer is the way it is directed inwards, to the heart of the believer. All too often our prayers about asking God to *send down* the Spirit, as if that same Holy Spirit has not been at work in us from the very beginning, from the time of creation and in a more specific way, from that first Pentecost day.

In our prayer (formally called *Veni Sancte Spiritus*) what is being sought is not a “coming down from heaven” but a “coming into our hearts”, a response to and an acceptance of the divine invitation for a life transformation. Biblically, the heart is where our true selves reside. It is in the heart that we love, respond to God, make our life decisions and plan for the future. What we do in our lives is shaped by the heart’s priorities. Observe what we do, how we live, act speak and think, and you know the nature of our hearts. Hence the opening of our prayer. Pentecost calls for an intentional re-focussing of our own lives, and that of our parish communities on the fundamentals of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Saying this prayer invites us to re-focus our total selves on God’s priorities.

Thus we are praying that God’s inner Holy Spirit take over the controls of our hearts and direct us in God’s way. No longer do we seek to be in control of life. We confidently and intentionally hand over ourselves to God. Imagine what that might look like for parish life? For us?

and kindle in us the fire of your love.

Once again we are being challenged to rethink the way we experience the Spirit at work. The “warmth” of the Spirit *is in us*, it is something God does in response to our praying. The image of a fire here is not of some camp-fire, or a fire under our saucepan as we cook supper. It is a raging bushfire, a code red firestorm churning out millions of joules of heat and power. A definition of fire from my early days in the CFA comes to mind: a fire is *an exothermic chemical reaction emitting heat and light*. It is not possible to have a fire without an external manifestation of fire. Fire by nature comes out, it overflows in all kinds of ways or there is no fire.

This is why saying this prayer comes with a warning. Do we really want the Holy Spirit to be kindled in our hearts? Are we prepared to have the spirit manifesting the divine graces in our lives? As it is nearly impossible to contain a code red bushfire, so too nothing can resist the moving Spirit once set free from within. That, in fact, is how we know we are responding to the Spirit – we can see the *light* and feel the *heat* of a spiritual transformation. No *light* and *heat* means no Spirit.

Send forth your Spirit and we shall be re-created.

This part of our prayer is so biblical, so reflective of what St Luke wrote of in both his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. There we find the evangelist speaking not of a new Israel but a reconstituted

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Israel. In Jesus and through Jesus, the failed and worn Israel of the Old Testament has been transformed and reconstituted in the person, mission and ministry of Jesus. This is a fundamental belief of the Church, for it means all of the promises and gifts made to the Hebrew people of old are taken up, applied and realised in the community gathering around Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of God. It is not a new people but a reconstituted people of God.

Israel's problem was her reluctance to return to the basics of their faith, to renew their lives with God. They believed they were doing all they could and that was enough. As the prophets proclaimed over and over again, they were far from the people they were called to be. They needed to repent and to keep on repenting. They were a people called upon to turn daily, in all things, to God. That did not happen by chance or through wishing and hoping for faithfulness. It was tough. It was hard work and a life-long commitment. This is why, by the time Jesus came among us, the Temple was all show and shell. It was torn down – under God's blessing – and replaced by the Renewed Temple which was no built by human hands. God is now worshipped in the person of Jesus. Hence our prayer for *recreation*. We are not *recreated* at baptism alone. We need to allow the Spirit of God to be an ongoing source of our recreation, on an individual level but also as faith communities gathering in Christ's name. If we continue on unchanged, untransformed by the Spirit; not renewed and purified by the *light* and *heat* of the Spirit ensconced in our hearts, then we end up like the old Jerusalem Temple. We become unable to proclaim effectively the Good News of God's salvation.

And You shall renew the face of the earth

And what is all of the above about? It is about collaborating with the saving works of God that had begun with the calling of Abraham. Sin turned the Garden of Eden into a dream for which we might long but never achieve. Gone were the abundance of good things and blessings God had lovingly poured out into creation for our enjoyment. However, such is the way of the Almighty that the human pilgrimage was all about a return to Edenic living, to a world where all men and women could walk together as one, walk in the cool of the evening with God. There was no need for a new creation, just a restoration of the world to its place under divine rule.

This is what God wants and this is why, at Pentecost He poured out the Spirit. The work inaugurated by Jesus our Saviour and Messiah continues in and through those who follow him as disciples and are transformed in the Spirit. The more we allow the Spirit to enlighten and transform us the more the world will come to know God through our words and actions, thoughts and deeds. The more others see and feel the *light* and *heat* of the Spirit beaming out of our hearts, the closer the peoples of the world come to experience the reality of God. They know the meaning of a true paradise – not just here on earth, but eternally at the side of God.

***O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His
consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.***

Having prayed the first part of the prayer, we can now conclude it in a way that puts the Spirit first in our considerations. The ending is filled with the actions of God and all of the verbs are meant to be understood as ongoing works of God. God does not instruct us as if occasionally is enough. That instruction is a continual process of enlightenment, something we need in our every action in order that others may know the warmth and light of the love of God open to us.

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