

Friends, may grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Holy Spirit has long been associated with wind and breath. The Hebrew and Greek words for Spirit, ruach and pneuma, have to do with air and breath. The wind of the Spirit makes its entrance in the first chapter of Genesis. A wind from God covers the face of the unformed deep. Then, in chapter two of Genesis, God breathes life into the newly formed human. Picture God doing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on Adam.

Breath. It defines life. Babies take that first big gulp of air when they're born. Their entrance into the world is defined by their first cry. We keep on breathing until we exhale our final breath.

Every day, we breathe about an average of 20,000 times. By the time we reach 50, we've taken about 400 million breaths. Typically, it's not something we think about. Breathing occurs all on its own. We're programmed to breathe in the same way our heart beats automatically.

Today we celebrate the day of Pentecost. It was the day when the Holy Spirit of God breathed into the young community of Jesus' followers. As Jesus prepared his disciples for his departure, he promised them that God would send a Holy Advocate to remain with them.

It was on this Jewish feast of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit breathed upon the early church. They were gathered in Jerusalem. Huddled, actually. They were cloistered together inside a house. While in the house, the Spirit came. It filled the house with the sound of a mighty wind. Not a gentle breeze – no, the sound of a violent wind. This wind breathes holy, heavenly life into the disciples. Three things happen:

- It pushes them out into the streets of Jerusalem. They'd been cloistered, but the Spirit directs them into the public square.

- They speak in varied languages, but the message is all the same: they proclaim God's deeds of power. They tell the message of Jesus' victory over death.

- And thirdly, these Galileans speak in the languages of the world. It's a preview of what's to come. This good news message of Jesus' healing love and life will spread to the entire world. This Holy Spirit wind will circle the earth and fill all things, all people.

Breathing. For the most part, we're unaware of how we breathe. It's just a background thing and occurs unconsciously. The same might be said of our relationship with the Holy Spirit of God. We aren't aware of its working. But there it is, actively engaged in, through, and around us. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is known as "the shy member of the Trinity." For the most part, the Holy Spirit works quietly and inconspicuously.

Jesus called it the "Paraclete." Loosely translated, it means "Advocate," "Helper," or "Comforter." Literally, the word Paraclete means "to call alongside." I picture a running coach running alongside you as you run a marathon. They run along beside you, calling out words of encouragement. They warn you when some sketchy terrain or a big hill is coming your way.

This is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God quietly encourages and urges us. It calls to us through hearing the good news. It enlightens and equips us through gifts of the Spirit. It gathers us together and sanctifies us for good works.

There are moments, in quiet times, when we become aware of our breathing. It's when we slow down and rest that we notice this dynamic that's always faithfully at work within us. When we lie down to sleep, when we sit

quietly in a chair, that's when it occurs to us that our breathing has been going on all the time.

In the same way, this quiet activity of God's Holy Spirit becomes more apparent to us when we're still. It was in the stillness of Mount Sinai that Elijah heard the still small voice of God. Samuel heard God call his name in the middle of the night when all was quiet in the house.

Being still may seem like we're doing nothing, but it's at these quiet times that the gentle actions of the Holy Spirit become more apparent to us. Becoming aware of your breathing is a tried-and-true part of meditation. It slows us down. As we center on our breathing, we slow from our anxious pace of living. Our heart rates decrease, our breathing eases.

Isn't this just like prayer? A prayerful pause can be a great oasis in the middle of a hectic day. To just sit quietly, become aware of our breathing and repeat within, "Come, Holy Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit."

Ironically, one time we become aware of our breathing is when we realize that we AREN'T breathing. When we're tense and uptight, we tend to restrict our breathing. There are times when I'm anxious that I have to remind myself, "Breathe, Michael!"

The same thing happens in our connectivity with God's Holy Spirit. We can become so enmeshed within our earthly aims and conflicts that they take over our center. They loom so huge that they fill our center, they usurp the place where God should go.

Just as there are times when we have to remind ourselves to breathe, there are also moments when we have to center our lives on God again. We need that daily reminder, that daily time to center and focus on God's faithful and loving

movement. The Holy Spirit is right there, our Advocate! The fresh wind of the Spirit is in and around us. It calls and gathers us anew.

On that day of Pentecost, the Spirit called the church of Christ outward. It breathed in the house where they were gathered and blew them into the streets of Jerusalem. It breathed new languages, new ways of interacting with the world.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, “The wind blows where it chooses. You hear the sound of it, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

On that day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit breathed life into the church of Jesus Christ. From within that tightly enclosed room, it came into their midst. It blew them into the streets of Jerusalem. It would continue to move them in unexpected ways and into unanticipated directions.

The Holy Spirit of God continues to push and move us into new pathways, new ways of interfacing with the world. This holy breath means to move us to ventures yet uncharted.

The Spirit breathes on us as it chooses. It directs us into arenas we could never anticipate. And how exciting is that! May the Holy Spirit breathe among us. May it invigorate and enliven our faith. This Spirit runs beside us and encourages us along the pathway of our lives, over rough terrains and through uncertain trails. May it continue to push us into unforeseen ventures. Come, Holy Spirit! Move your church! Open us to the ever-new vista unfolding before us, full of grace and life! Amen.