

“Hello.” (PAUSE) “I say HELLO.” Not much of a “greeting”, but more of an acknowledgement of another’s presence. Jesus greeted his disciples with “Shalom”, which translates to “Peace”. Almost more of a blessing than a greeting. And in this time of their lives the disciples needed some peace, peace from their fear of retaliation at the hands of the Jews. Peace of heart over the loss of their Rabbi, their teacher. Peace of mind as to what may be in store for them. They may have felt like they were just left ORPHANS at a time when they needed Christ among them the most.

My Mom passed away nine years ago this coming August. My Dad passed in December of 1999. This left my brother, sister, and I orphans by definition. Yet, I will NOT be an orphan because I have what my parents have GIVEN to me of themselves – my Mom passed along how to cook and sew, and my Dad showed me how to fish, hunt, build things, and do electrical work without getting shocked more than once per project. And they both taught me to think, to reason things out, and to be good toward others and to be grateful.

This is a similar way to how Jesus left his disciples. He told them he would not leave them orphans, but would always be with them, because he would give to them his Holy Spirit. All that he had taught them over the previous three years would be necessary for them to know in order to carry on his mission of proclaiming the Good News throughout the world. He also knew that they would need to be **strengthened** in will and character, and be reinforced, REASSURED, of his presence among them, and this was the purpose of giving them the Holy Spirit.

But who is the Holy Spirit? If we look at the many murals in Catholic churches we see the Spirit depicted as a dove, a bird. But he is NOT a bird. When we read about Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan we see “the Spirit of God descending **LIKE** a dove [and] coming upon him.” If you watch doves coming to a landing you notice their soft, graceful approach, almost a hovering before they light down. The grace of God comes to us, just as it did to Jesus, gently, softly; never pounded or forcefully pressed upon us.

We also see the Spirit, as we read today, depicted as “tongues **AS OF** fire.” Again the poetic use of words to describe the indescribable. The “tongues as of fire” is the “Lumen Christi, Light of Christ” which we saw for the first time at the Easter Vigil in the matter of the Pascal Candle. Fire, which gives light and heat, is used to represent the Spirit of Christ himself coming upon and into the hearts of those in the room. The Light of Christ to guide their way, with the burning love and zeal for the mission they are about to conduct. A fire that fully consumes, but does not destroy.

Or is the Holy Spirit “like a strong driving wind” or a breath of air? Just as God BREATHED life into Adam, today we read that Jesus BREATHED the Holy Spirit upon the disciples telling them “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is life, new life, renewed life, recreated life, the life of Jesus, God’s gift to us, His gift of LOVE. And this same Holy Spirit is given to us at baptism, and again reinforced at our confirmation as we are **sealed** with the Holy Spirit, to strengthen our will and character when it comes to following Jesus into carrying on his mission in our lives, in **our** time.

Just as Jesus ascended from the sights of his disciples to a place of importance, so too will this Pascal Candle, the symbol of Christ’s light in the world, be removed from our sight to a place of reverence, to be lit, not at every Mass as we’ve seen since that Easter vigil, but on the occasions of baptisms, where we first come to see the light of Christ, and at funerals, as the light that guides us home to him again, because we are children of light, **living** Easter candles of faith. The candle itself may leave from our sight, but Jesus is always with us thru his gift of the Holy Spirit.

None of us are truly orphans; we are one family of faith, with God as our Eternal Father, Jesus our brother, and the Holy Spirit our love, life, and strength. We are Church.