

Spirituality



"Illumination," by St. Joseph Sr. Mary Southard



by Christine Schenk

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

May 19, 2018

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

While Advent is my favorite liturgical season, Pentecost — which we celebrate on Sunday — is far and away my favorite feast.

Although Easter is the most important theologically, Pentecost celebrates how Jesus' resurrection plays out in each one of us, as well as in the church.

Pentecost is the preeminent celebration of the Holy Spirit. It relates deeply to the dynamism of Jesus' mission in our world today.

That is, it relates deeply to *our* call and our experience of Jesus' Spirit in helping us believe in and build a new reign of God where God's values are paramount.

That means a reign where there is no more fake news. No more gun violence or sex trafficking. No more lying, cheating, corruption or despoiling the environment. No more hate speech against minorities and LGBT people. No more exploitation of the poor leading to their homelessness, hunger and horrible health.

Yeah, I know it sounds impossible.

But, as Jesus-followers we have been given power to live on behalf of the values of God.

We have been given spiritual power to resist the "fleshly" mindset that tells us that everyone fudges with the truth and to be successful one must adopt a "me first" attitude that marginalizes others. And then there is the ever-present cynicism that says, "Well, it's a shame but what can anyone do?" We buy into the myth that we are powerless in the face of societal degradation.

It is easier to dismiss the Spirit-power within us than to do something about the pain and evil in our world.

No, we Christians are not powerless. We just need to learn how to live within the power of the Spirit — and then get out of the way.

If you are wondering what Spirit-power looks like, check out Chapter 8 of Paul's letter to the Romans.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death (2).

But you are not in the flesh ... you are in the Spirit since the Spirit of God dwells in you (9).

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait ... (22-23).

If God is for us, who is against us? (31)

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (38-39).

Paul's letters are the earliest New Testament writings we have. Jesuit Fr. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, a renowned biblical scholar, tells us the letter to the Romans "affected later Christian theology more than any other New Testament book."

Paul is a lot like us. He never met Jesus in person. His understanding of the Christ mystery came through an overwhelming experience of the Spirit of God that helped him see that by persecuting Christians he was persecuting Christ.

Advertisement

Some among us may simply be confused about where God is actually calling us — especially since we know our weakness all too well. For others, the suffering entailed by claiming our Spirit-power is what probably holds us back.

If we live within the Spirit, we will eventually be called to stand tall for God's values in this sinful world. And that witness comes with a cost. But when we live within the Spirit we are also given what we need in our weakness:

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for [us] according to the will of God (Romans 8:26-27).

All we have to do is show up. The Spirit helps us when we don't know where to turn or how to pray.

And about the suffering part? Paul reminds us: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through the one who loved us" (Romans 8:35, 37).

This Pentecost, how will you claim your Spirit-power on behalf of a world so loved by God?

PS: One way to claim your Spirit-power today is to visit the NETWORK website and [email or call](#) your congressperson asking them to reject H.R. 2 and protect food assistance to needy families.

[St. Joseph Sr. Christine Schenk served urban families for 18 years as a nurse midwife before co-founding FutureChurch, where she served for 23 years. She holds master's degrees in nursing and theology.]