

FEAST OF PENTECOST
May 19, 2013 Year C

Theme: Breath of the Risen Christ

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(With the help of the microphone breathe heavily outward)

Breath.

Unless lung or heart problems caused us to struggle up the steep ramps, few us have given a thought to breathing this morning.

Yet, already – without our conscious awareness -- we have taken thousands of breaths, bringing precious, essential oxygen into our bodies.

Without breathing and the steady supply of oxygen it provides our bodies, they would, as we know, soon deteriorate and shut down; the brain would be unalterably harmed and death would soon follow.

Can we take anything from this physical reality and apply it to the words of our Gospel text: **“[The Risen Lord] then breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit”?**

Jesus equates his own breath with the Holy Spirit and then breathes that Spirit into his disciples, the first church.

Now remember, of course, this is the Risen Christ who is doing the breathing.

The whole scene evokes an extremely similar scene from the Book of Genesis, where in the second chapter the Lord God created humankind from the dust of the ground and as the text says:

“blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”

Thus, the Risen Jesus breathed his church into life by breathing his own risen life, the Holy Spirit, into them.

This “breath” of the Risen Lord would be the life force that would sustain them even when they were unaware of its presence,
....unaware of its working to supply them with the sustaining, energizing forces that made their Christian living, their Gospel efforts possible.

Literally, then, the Holy Spirit is the breath of the Church, the breath of every follower of Jesus Christ.

Though we may not be any more aware of the Spirit than we are of our own breathing, we cannot exist as Christians without the Spirit constantly bringing us a renewed supply of the energy coming from the Risen Christ.

The risen Jesus left us two thousand years ago but because he breathed his own Spirit into us, we can be assured we are being true to his message.

The Spirit keeps the life and message of Jesus breathing in us.

Another parallel might be in times of crisis or threat: the body kicks into crisis mode and increases its pace at breathing to supply more oxygen to the organs to be ready for increased demands.

During crisis times for the Church, perhaps, then too the Spirit comes at an increased pace to supply additional spiritual resources to meet the demands.

As an individual Christian distinguishing the breath of the Holy Spirit and simple coincidence in life is not always easy.

When a phone call from a friend was a coincidence and when it was a blessed prompting of the Holy Spirit, who knows?

When finding the perfect quote to end an important speech at work is a gift of the Holy Spirit and when its wonderful coincidence is debatable.

What is not debatable is when you can look back on your life's many blessings and know you have been guided and prompted by a power and a force beyond your own control: namely, the breath of the Risen Jesus.

The great masters of spirituality in our tradition have suggested a powerful means of coming in touch with this divine breath

Try it now but repeat it later when you are alone and have more time.

Find a comfortable position, sitting or lying down, one you can hold with moving for ten to fifteen minutes.

When comfortable, coax your body to relax, especially any parts that may be aching or uncomfortable.

Then, begin to focus on your breathing: do not control it, just observe yourself breathing in and out.

Stay with this for a few minutes: perhaps breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth; experience the passage of air; again do not control it, just experience it.

When you are ready, begin to think of breathing in the Spirit of the Risen Jesus.

Perhaps mentally think the words: "Come, Spirit of Jesus."

Exhale anything you want to get rid of: anger, fear, loneliness, etc.

This simple technique uses our bodily rhythm of breathing to grasp the words of the Risen Jesus: **"Receive the Holy Spirit."**