



Come Holy Spirit and Renew the Face of the Earth!

Very dear Sisters and friends,

Greetings of peace and grace in these trying times! It has been a while since I sent you a circular and things have evolved so much since then. I take this opportunity to thank each one of you for the many messages expressing your concerns, sharing your experiences, discussing your dreams, and assuring me of your prayers and support. I would have loved to be in touch with you personally but that ideal is still a bit far from us. In the coming months, we shall definitely explore new ways of communicating.

We have been facing many new challenges since the outbreak of the coronavirus. We expect that the post COVID-19 period will be harder than the pandemic itself. In this context of much anguish, fear and uncertainties, the prayer, “Come Holy Spirit and renew the face of the earth” has a new urgency and the celebration of the feast of Pentecost this year has a special meaning and significance.



THE JOHANNINE PENTECOST

In the Johannine narrative, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the breathing out of the Holy Spirit and the commissioning of the disciples form a single narrative of the Risen Lord’s appearance to the disciples after his death and resurrection (20:1-31). In the Gospel text chosen for Pentecost (20:19-23), the **risen Lord** appeared to the **frightened disciples** and greeted them saying: “**Peace be with you**” and the disciples were overjoyed. This gift of peace is a necessary precondition for their receiving the mission as apostles of Jesus: “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, **I also send you**”. This peace also prepares the disciples to receive the Spirit which will recreate them to be commissioned by the risen Lord. Jesus, then, **breathed** on them saying: “**receive the Holy Spirit**” and commissioned them with a **mission** of forgiving and retaining sins.

A **new creation** is taking place here in the Johannine narrative. The condition of the disciples changes from the “fear of the Jews” to that of rejoicing. The breath of Jesus reminds us of the wind from God hovering over the face of the earth in the creation account of Genesis (1:2). The verb “to breathe” alludes to the creative activity of God’s breathing the breath of life into the first human being in Genesis (2:7). One can also think of the “breath of life” in the visions of Ezekiel foretelling the renewal and restoration of Israel (37:9-10). The bestowal of the Holy Spirit thus signals a new beginning of a new covenant community sharing in the life of Jesus. It is the beginning or the **birth** of the post-Easter life of the early church.

How do we understand the mission of the disciples as forgiving and retaining sins? The first thing that we observe is that Jesus is referring to all the disciples. In John’s Gospel, sins are primarily a failure in recognizing the presence of God in the person of Jesus along with its moral and social implications (15:22-24). Similarly, in the Johannine theological framework, people judge themselves during their life here on earth when they fail to recognize the ongoing presence of God in the life and mission of Jesus (3:19). The disciples are sent by Jesus as Jesus was sent by the Father to continue the same mission of Jesus under the guidance of the Spirit. If we weave these theological strands together, the Johannine understanding of the mission of the disciples, forgiving and retaining sins, would refer to **bearing witness to the creative and healing presence of God** in the world. This new life in the Spirit impels the disciples to a constant discernment in response to the ongoing interventions of God in the unfolding history of humanity.

OUR PENTECOST TODAY

The experience of Pentecost was the **foundational God-experience** of the early Christian community. It is an opportunity for us to return to the foundational God-experiences of our families, of our congregation as well as those of our respective provinces/region. We are also called to revisit our own personal foundational God-experience that inspired us to say “Yes” to God, that empowered us to leave our homes and parents in order to follow Jesus in the congregation. Can we think of the moment when we first fell in love with the consecrated life or when we first had the passion for God’s mission? Although we face difficulties and new challenges, we have received the word and accepted our religious calling with a joy inspired by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Thess 1:6). Saint Marie Eugenie’s joy was her “gaze is fixed on Jesus Christ and the extension of His Reign.” Are we ready and daring enough to remain focused on the ultimate goal of our Christian/Religious vocation – our self-gift to God at the service of God’s creative and lifegiving mission? Here is an invitation to reread the pandemic experience in light of our foundational God-experience.

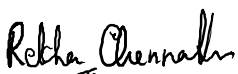
This feast has a special significance for us as we try to make **discernment** a way of life. One can glean from the Johannine text a process of discernment: making oneself free, receiving and listening to the Spirit and saying YES to the mission of revealing God’s presence – God’s justice and mercy. In the perspective of Johannine theology, it would be a sin to be blind to the realities around us, to be blind to the signs of the times, to the signals of God’s presence and action! Here is an invitation to discern the new calls and new faces of our mission in this pandemic and post-pandemic period.

The reception of the Holy Spirit brought a radical **transformation** into the lives of the disciples. They were fearful, confused, frightened and distracted after the crucifixion and death of Jesus. But something happened to them when they received the Spirit. They became joyful, confident, daring and focused on their mission. We pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost this year, which will blow away not only the deadly Covid-19 but also the viruses of fear, gossip, mistrust, mediocrity, and indifference from our hearts and make us joyful messengers of hope in our wounded world. Here is an invitation to allow ourselves to be renewed in our attitudes and life-styles in response to the new calls of this coronavirus pandemic.

As we celebrate Pentecost this year, let us remember that this crisis situation is not endless. This pandemic or post pandemic period will also give way to a new phase in the unfolding history of humanity. Let us join the Psalmist and pray: “Send forth your spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth”. Something new is emerging which will soon become a “new normal” lifestyle and behavior. Let the celebrations of Pentecost this year be an occasion to appropriate this **newness** and also to reclaim our renewed human-family bond and concern for “our common home”. Let us allow ourselves to be recreated by the Spirit to welcome this newness and to bring forth **new life**.

I enclose a “meditation” on John 20: 19-23 for those who might like it. Soon I will send you another circular with more reflections on the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic, some news from the motherhouse and decisions of the General Community for the coming months.

United with each one of you in God’s infinite love!



Sister Rekha Chennattu, RA
Superior General

Auteuil, 31 May 2020

A Meditation on John 20:19-23
In the context of the Covid 19 Pandemic and the Feast of Pentecost

Let me begin with a word on my understanding of the concept - meditation. I am integrating, in my own way, both Indian and biblical traditions.

Meditation is a process of getting in touch with our true selves in the depth of the silence of our being in the presence of the Divine (in and through the WORD of God or other times without a particular scriptural text). This process is a healing, transformative, and grace-filled experience.

Meditations help us

- to make our prayer more and more transformative with a real impact upon our daily life.
- to bridge the gap between our God-experience in prayer and our behaviour in day-to-day lives.
- to become less distracted and more focused.
- to become free and more committed.

Of course, it is all about God's grace. But we have to open ourselves to receive this grace. Meditations help us to do our part with humility and then surrender ourselves into the hands of God. It is a way of growing in spiritual life and in the grace of inner freedom and joy.

At the beginning, just focus upon the simple physical exercise of breathing in and breathing out. Feel the simple sensation of your breath and be aware of the fact that you are breathing in the life of the Spirit and breathing out the negative energy accumulated within you. Somewhere in this process, you will come face to face with the lights and shadows of your life – who you are/ where you are in your journey of life/ how you are behaving/ what your deepest desires are. Go gently, slowly, with perseverance and understanding. There is neither judgement nor reason to be frightened of your real self. There is no reason to become upset about yourself.

If possible, try to avoid having a “distracted mind” (a jumpy mind – a mind that jumps from one thing to another) or a “sleeping mind” (a mind that is disconnected from your breathing process). What you need is a focused mind, and clear awareness. Every time you falter, just start all over again. In other words, if you find yourself distracted, try to return to the centre, to the breathing process, into the depth of your being, aware of the process. It requires practice... take one simple step at a time....

I invite you to try an imaginative and contemplative meditation on John 20:19-23, sensitive to the present reality in which you find yourself.

You read the text slowly before you come for the meditation. Any brief commentary on the text can be of help for those who wish to use one. You have to prepare the route before you set out on your journey.

John 20:19-23. This brief narrative of five verses has seven important moments: Jesus' entry through the closed doors and standing in the midst of the disciples, the greeting of peace, the inner movement or the transformation from within the disciples from fear to rejoicing, the sending of the disciples, the breathing on the disciples, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the commissioning of the disciples to forgive and retain sins. You may need several hours/days for the contemplation of the entire text. But you do what you can in these 45 minutes.

Begin the meditation with the hymn – Come Holy Spirit.

1. After having taken a comfortable sitting position for prayer, place yourselves in the presence of God. You shall slowly enter into a moment of silence by focusing on your breathing – imagine that you are breathing in the breath of the risen Jesus and breathing out all our negative energies, fears, and worries. This first moment will help you to discipline your mind and enjoy the silence in the depth of your being.
2. Once you are in communion with the Lord at the depth of your being, identify one thing (a fear or worry or experience) that you have in your life at this moment that leads you to close the door of your life. Do not run away from it, but run towards it and face it in the presence of Jesus. Have a dialogue with the risen Lord about it. Listen to the voice of the Spirit/Lord.
3. Imagine and experience the presence of the risen Jesus with his greetings of peace, joy, and wellness. Can you allow yourself to be transformed by the grace of the risen Lord? For example, allow Jesus to replace your fear of uncertainties with the assurance of a better future. Or allow the Risen Lord to replace your negative thoughts with positive insights, your distractions with the capacity to remain focused, etc.
4. Jesus wants you to be his apostle and sends you as the Father has sent Jesus. Where are you now? And where does Jesus want to send you? Are you ready to become his apostle, the sent one? Are you ready to leave familiar places or give up familiar ways of doing things? Pay attention to the inner movement of your body and mind.
5. Experience the breath of Jesus in your body as it permeates your whole being – from the head to the toes. You are now filled with the Spirit of God and commissioned to reveal the face of God in the world stricken by the Pandemic and its consequences. What does this commission mean in your personal life in the context within which you live and exercise your mission?
6. Make one resolution or step forward which would make a difference in your attitude, behavior/lifestyles, or commitment. Breathe in the vibes of this new attitude that you desire. Breathe out your shadows – negative thoughts.
7. Be filled with this grace and allow it to become part of your being. Send out the vibes of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to all and remain within the orbit of universal communion. Thank God for this experience of grace and pray for yourself, community/family members, and for others and also for Mother Earth – our common home.

Share your experience of the meditation with the members of your community or family. This sharing will foster communion and build up relationships. You will have to repeat this meditation several times so that it gradually transforms you with a lasting impact and effect.

May we let the experience of the disciples on the day of Pentecost come alive in each one of us and make us joyful messengers of a hope that brings forth new life.

Rekha Chennattu, RA

Paris, 31st May 2020.