



The Redemptorist seminary I attended many years ago was located on beautiful land overlooking the Hudson River, near Kingston, New York, in a little hamlet called Esopus. It was there that I was ordained to the priesthood. The property was quite expansive and we owned four or five horses that had once worked at police horses in New York City. I was never much for riding the horses since they seemed to prefer less *well-built* men than myself. However, I was assigned to care for them on the horse crew. So, every day I had to go the barn, clean their stalls, feed them and wash them. These horses were quite placid, but they were quite intelligent and they could sense my anxiety as I cared for them so they seemed to occasionally play with me by brushing into me and making loud sounds. After a few weeks of this work, I suddenly found myself having an attack of what turned out to be a form of asthma. For several hours, I was short of breath. It frightened me so much that I went to the emergency room, was giving an injection, and told that it was probably due to working with hay and horses. I have never had another attack and I retired from my horse work. Naturally, my loving classmates chose to say that I was more allergic to work than horses. I will let you be the judge of that.

Still, being short of breath is a serious and frightening medical concern. It is often the sign of heart or lung issues. It is very painful to see a person struggling to breath and gasping for air. We cannot live without breathing. When I teach children about God and prayer, I tell them to pay attention to their breathing and to notice that they are drawing breath in and out. At first, they exaggerate this and make all sorts of sounds but then they slowly settle down and a calm takes over. I explain to them that God is as close to them as their breath. If they pay attention to the breathing, they can sense the presence of God and how he is always with us. In the creation story of world from the *Book of*

Genesis, we hear: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the world, and the Spirit of God was moving over the Surface of the world. Over the vast emptiness of the unformed universe was the hovering Spirit of God. Listen to how the inspired writer of Genesis describes the creations of human beings: And the Lord God formed humanity from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. Human beings are from the earth but the living breath that we call the soul is from God. We are wonderfully fearfully made. The word spirit comes from the Latin word spiritus. Spiritus means breath, courage, spirit or soul. We speak of the Bible as being the inspired word of God: the word inspire means to breathe into. To say the Bible is inspired means God breathe himself into the human language.

Spirit is an elusive term just as is breath. I am sure a biology major or a doctor could give a very clear and scientific explanation of what is breath. But most of us take our breathing for granted, and rarely notice it unless there is a medical problem; we keep moving about with the thousand things we must do. Occasionally, we may notice we are short of breath as we rush for train or go up a hill, but like much of our biological functions, it is just there and doing its job in keeping us alive.

So, I suppose it is not surprising that we tend to think of the Holy Spirit in similar ways. We know that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Blessed Trinity. God is three persons in one God. In our prayers and language, we often talk about God. *God saved me. I could have made it through that terrible ordeal without the love of God. God is good. Thank God. O my God* are phrases that we are quick to say, sometimes in prayer and other times in worry or concern. When we say such words, I know I am not thinking in clear theological categories. Am I speaking about the Trinity or God the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit when I use the word God? We have a sense in our minds of God the Father. We all have had Fathers so we have a good sense of the word. We have seen movies with both serious and humorous images of God the Father. I think of Michelangelo's famous painting in the Sistine Chapel of God with the hand of the Father reaching out the hand of Adam and bringing him to life. We kind of think we know God the Father.

Certainly, Jesus is the most familiar person of the Blessed Trinity to us. We hear the Gospels about Jesus at every Mass. Jesus took flesh and became human and did the very human things that we do: we eat, we sleep, we talk, we have friends and people we love, we cry and we get afraid. Jesus did all those things. Jesus did that which is most human of all – he died. I think if I asked every one of you in church today to describe Jesus to me, you would have some image that would come to mind. Jesus makes God touchable for us. He told us: *The one who sees him, see the Father.*

But now on to that elusive Holy Spirit, the breath of God. Perhaps, we could feature the Holy Spirit on John Walsh's television show America's most wanted. We use a color to describe the Holy Spirit: red. We use the image of tongues of fire to help us envision the Spirit. We focus on a Sacrament of Confirmation to capture the mystery of the Holy

Spirit. We call the Holy Spirit the Advocate and Counselor, the Paraclete. When I was in school we prayed to the Holy Spirit before a test or an exam. The job description for the Holy Spirit seemed to be two show up for Confirmations. I think of the story of parents who had three children. The first child has a photo album filled with thousands of pictures of almost every moment of his or her life. The second child has a photo album, but it has no pictures in it. The third child does not even have a blank photo album. I think we sometimes think of the Holy Spirit as the forgotten person of the Blessed Trinity.

This coming week is the feast of the Ascension and soon we will celebrate the Great Feast of Pentecost. Today, in our Gospel reading, Jesus makes a promise to us: *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows him. But you know him, because he remains with you, and will be in you.*

You and I live in the time of the Holy Spirit. Jesus has asked the Father and he has sent to us the Holy Spirit. **Simply put, the Holy Spirit is the very real presence of God on earth.** Whatever faith we have, whatever love is in our hearts, whenever we try to love God, all this grace comes from the gentle and not so gentle nudges of the Holy Spirit. We live and move and have our being in the presence of God. You want to know how close is the Spirit of God to you. Notice your breathing. Feel your breath. That is the living presence of God in you and me. Come Holy Spirit, Come.