

## “Dynamite”

With the controversy surrounding our national position in regards the Paris Accord, the subject of the environment and energy is in the forefront once again. Over the past 50 years nothing has been more polarizing than energy. So much so that we as a culture have been willing to sacrifice our sons and daughters to violence in order that we may have some assurance of available energy. In our current battle the lines on the ground have been clearly marked. Proponents of fossil fuel stand in opposition to those who promote more sustainable sources of energy. And each has a convincing argument as to why the other is wrong. In the meantime, the appetite for energy increases and the powers that be, continue to engage in endless detent as a canard to disguise their own self-serving enterprises. Meanwhile the task of searching for untapped energy resources continues with its implication that such a source is right under our noses.

Today on Pentecost Sunday I am reminded of the Church’s similar energy crises and our constant struggle to accomplish much with what seems to be an ever-diminishing source of energy. And it is on Pentecost Sunday that we are all reminded that the Holy Spirit’s power seems to be a largely untapped source of energy for many in the Church today.

In John’s gospel, Pentecost means peace: **“Peace be with you”** as we read in John chapter 20, or it means pardon: **“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven”** as we find in verse 23. But as good as these are it is power that makes the difference. In the Book of the Prophet Joel we hear: **“I will pour out my spirit upon all mankind.”** Joel goes on to describe what a powerful thing this Spirit is. Power is a powerful word. Power is a daily habit. In the morning we turn on our showers with their power heads, we eat a power breakfast and drive our cars with power steering. Power drinks and power bars keeps us going so we can make our power meetings with power point presentations, and during them we take power naps. Put the word power in a name and your in business...check the phone book and you will find along with the power company, power clean, power lift, flower power, power mart, power one, power training, power zone.

Then you’ve got economic power, political power, and personal power. Then you have political which is another thing altogether. If you think it’s love that makes the world go around, you’ve never tried money. There is also social pressure. The society that surrounds you can be your salvation: strengthen you when you are weak, inspire you when down, lift you out of the loneliness that makes living unlivable. But it can enslave you as well. Where you live, what you wear, what you drive, where your kids go to school, these are for the most part dictated by social pressure. Powerful role models play their part too. From the latest American Idol to the most overpaid athlete, society at large seems to believe these people know more than most people about most things and we know this is true or we wouldn’t be buying the stuff they advertise for Madison Avenue. That’s power.

So much for power in the world. It baffles and entrances me all at the same time. But more importantly, it reminds me that there is another kind of power that in a sense is “out of this world.” An untapped power we bypass at our peril, a power more critical for human existence that politics and economics, society or peer pressure. It is the power of the Spirit. What do I mean?

Well, think about this, how could a teenage Jewish virgin clothe God’s son in her flesh? Hear the words of Luke: **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you; the power of the most high will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the son of God”**

What did the risen Jesus promise his apostles just before ascending to his Father to make their efforts in the world effective? **“You shall receive *power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”**

How did St. Paul preach to the people of Corinth? **“I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstrations of the Spirit of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the *power* of God.”** How did St. Paul win obedience to Christ from the Gentiles? In his own words, “by the *power* of the Spirit” as we read in Romans chapter 15. What was his prayer for the Christians at Rome? **“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that be the *power* of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”**

In all these instances, the Greek word for power is “dynamis” the same root word for dynamic, which is also the root for dynamo and dynamite. The Holy Spirit is dynamite. This is the dynamo Jesus promised the apostles the night before he died: “another counselor, to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth...he will teach you all things...guide you to all truth. This same Spirit the risen Jesus breathed into his disciples for the forgiveness of the whole world’s sins: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.” This is the Spirit that filled the Church on the very first Pentecost, when they began to speak in tongues. Dynamized by this Spirit, Peter and John, “uneducated, common men,” preached Christ crucified and risen with “boldness” as we read in Acts chapter 4. Dynamized by this Spirit, the apostles laughed at chains and threats. In fact, the Acts of the Apostles is from beginning to end a story of the Spirit: the irrepressible power of God’s presence. Read through Paul’s letters and the power of the Spirit comes to life. The Holy Spirit lives in you as a shrine, frees you from sin and death, makes you sons and daughters of God, helps you in your weakness, and intercedes for you with the Father. Only in the power of the Spirit can you believe the unbelievable, hope for the grace beyond your grasp, the glory beyond the grave, love, with God’s own love poured into your hearts. If you walk by the Spirit, Paul insists, you will be kind and good, grow gentle and prove faithful, experience incomparable peace and a joy the world cannot give.

So then, two powers: power in the world, and power in the Spirit. Where do we go from here? It doesn’t make any sense to demonize the one and praise the other especially since for all its flaws, this is still the world God made, the world God gazed on in the beginning saying: **“and behold, it was very good”** Politics, economics and society are not the beasts of the book of Revelation. Despite all the sin that can infest them, they are born out of the intelligence and freedom God gave us when he commanded us to master the earth.

So, with this perspective our Christian task is not to sever the two powers but to link them together, unite them in a dance, a harmony in which the two make something splendid together. It begins with who we perceive ourselves to be. Ask yourself this question; “Am I just a Sunday morning Christian?” You know what I am talking about. What we do here together isn’t a private party where we gather together for one blessed hour of forgetfulness. This liturgy of the Holy Spirit sends us back into the world and its powers: back to society and the politics and economics, to the countless instruments of power both great and small that dynamize this universe and your little corner of it. Not to despise or destroy them, but to grace them “with the Spirit of the gospel.” Whatever power you possess—and there is no one here without power, without the ability to do something, to act, to accomplish—shape that power into a servant, instead of a tyrant. Make sure your power *in* the world is a power *for* the world. Make sure that, the more powerful you are, the more you are men and women for others and as such for God.

Only one way to assure this, to guarantee that power in the world will not corrupt; let your power in the world be shaped by the power of the Spirit: let your every thought and word and gesture reflect the presence of God within you, the presence that is dynamite if you will only let it be.

What's the proof? remember Mother Teresa cradling Calcutta's rejects, offering to take any and every unwanted person? How about closer to home. Those folks who week after week make tacos and drive down to where the hungry hang out. How about the thankless work of those in the Saint Vincent de Paul Society visiting with those who's lives are cornered with debt and want as well as drug dependence, alcoholism and abuse, lending the powerless the power to believe again, hope afresh and love anew? How about those who plan their week around the hour they will spend in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament...often the very same people I have just mentioned. The examples are legion, and the needs are endless. Right now, the need I see beneath all needs is for each of you to simply realize how powerful you are...a testimony to the fact that the Spirit has been with us since before time. Rediscover where and how you can make things happen—from a smile on a careworn face, to understanding that what you have is only a gift of God, through legislation for the afflicted, to peace in some corner of your world. Link your power in the world to the power within you, the Spirit of light and of life.