
Come Holy Spirit!

January 21, 2018

In Archbishop Naumann's January 5th column in the Leaven, he introduced an Italian mystic by the name of Blessed Elena Guerra. She lived from 1835 – 1914. During the 19th century Catholic spirituality was largely centered on the cross and penance, but Blessed Elena had mystical experiences that focused her on the personal love of God himself who is the Holy Spirit. She would go on to found a community called the Oblates of the Holy Spirit.

She wrote 12 letters to Pope Leo XIII asking the Holy Father to renew devotion to the Holy Spirit throughout the Catholic Church. Not long after, Pope Leo wrote an encyclical on the Holy Spirit in 1897. In the encyclical, he asked Bishops throughout the world to promote devotion to the Holy Spirit and requested a novena to the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the 20th century.

On January 1, 1901, Pope Leo prayed for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church. He sang the traditional hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus – Come Holy Spirit* - in front of the famous Holy Spirit window in St. Peter's in Rome. On that same day, the Holy Spirit came down upon Protestant students at Bethel College in Topeka. Many consider this the beginning of the Protestant Pentecostal movement.

Interestingly, Dr. Mary Healy, who is an author and professor at a Catholic seminary, said that when the Pope wrote the encyclical it got a tepid response among the Bishops. She suggests that the Catholic Church at the time was not prepared for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. If we are not receptive to the gifts God wants to give us, then he pours them out on those who are open. We see this throughout history. God wanted to pour generous gifts upon his chosen people, the Jews, but when they rejected his Son, he lavished his gifts upon the Gentiles.

Archbishop Naumann is asking all of us to be receptive and open to a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In fact, he wrote his Leaven article because he is asking all the Catholics in the Archdiocese to pray daily for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit throughout 2018.

A few weeks ago, Fr. Shawn preached all the masses on the feast of Epiphany and remember his first point: Pay attention! As I read the Archbishop's article, I thought, "We've got to pay attention!" The Archbishop is asking us all to do something. We should pay attention. And then remember Fr. Shawn's second point? It's not enough to just pay attention, we have to act. Wow, what if all of us actually acted on what the Archbishop is asking? What if all of us actually prayed daily to the Holy Spirit throughout 2018? Something amazing will happen!

In his article, the Archbishop asked us to choose one of three prayers to the Holy Spirit and to pray it daily throughout 2018. We have 500 copies of each of the three prayers in the Narthex today. On your way out, please pick one of these up. Commit to praying this prayer throughout 2018. Put this holy card in your daily prayer book. Or families, pray this together each night before dinner or before you go to bed.

Also, earlier this week, I was talking to our youth minister Kevin Bailey who attended a conference on the Holy Spirit last summer. He shared with me that he learned the two biggest blocks to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives are: failure to repent and unforgiveness. What is the first reading and gospel about today? Repentance! Jonah goes to Nineveh to preach repentance. And in the gospel as Jesus begins his public ministry and what are his first words? “Repent and believe in the gospel.”

Saying this prayer is incredibly important, but it’s not enough. We also have to repent. Repentance involves making a turn. We turn away *from* something – namely sin – and *toward* someone, namely Christ. What is God asking you to let go of in your life so that the Holy Spirit can enter? When Jesus called the apostles, they let go of their nets and immediately followed him. What do those nets represent in your own life?

When I was vocation director I used to go down to the youth camp during the summers. I got to do most of their fun activities: the rock wall, the zip line, but the absolute scariest thing I ever did down there was the power pole. You had to scale basically this telephone poll. It had steps going up. Going up wasn’t bad, but when you got to the top, you had to stand up on top of this telephone poll not hanging on to anything and then you were supposed to jump off and catch this trapeze bar. I got to the top of the telephone poll and froze. I thought they were going to have to bring a helicopter to get me down. I couldn’t let go and stand up. The kids below began chanting for me and eventually I did it. My point is, it’s hard to let go.

Think of when Jesus called the Apostles. They let go of everything they knew. They let go of their nets and followed Jesus. They had no idea where he would lead them. What is it that God is asking us to let go of so that I can follow Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit into my life? Technology? Video Games? Constant running around? Is there a sin that has enslaved me?

Certainly, one of the most basic ways we celebrate repentance is regular confession. There is nothing God likes to do more than forgive our sins. And then we are called to extend that mercy to others. The Holy Spirit cannot enter the heart hardened by bitterness, grudges and unforgiveness. If you are struggling to forgive someone, pray this prayer to the Holy Spirit asking the Holy Spirit to help you let go of any past hurts.

What will happen when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives? Here is what the bible says: “The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness and chastity.” Aren’t these fruits that all of us yearn for in our hearts? Let’s pay attention to what the Archbishop is asking and pray boldly each day for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Come Holy Spirit!