

**MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENTS
OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
AT PENTECOST 2003**

“A Helper Has Come”

“... For if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment; about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.” (John 16: 7-11, NRSV)

“When the Day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And ... all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit...” (Acts 2: 1-4, NRSV)

The Greek word used by John to describe the Holy Spirit is Parakletos, meaning Advocate, counselor, comforter, and defender. The Spirit is our helper and our comforter in affliction. The disciples had never experienced greater need of a helper than on the evening of Christ’s betrayal. It was a night when they felt themselves in the grip of bewilderment. So long as Christ was physically present with them, he could act as his own interpreter. Whenever the disciples misunderstood, he could repeat his teaching to them. They had no need of another to enlighten, to witness through mighty acts, or to bring his words to remembrance.

But in announcing his departure from them, Jesus promised that an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, would be sent to act as their faithful helper and to accomplish the further task of proving the world fundamentally wrong in its views of sin, righteousness, and judgment. For the world has sinned in refusing to accept that God is to be found in the living Christ, that righteousness is embodied in the ascended Christ, and that judgment will fall upon those who prefer a worldly prince to the Prince of Peace. Jesus told the disciples plainly that the Spirit would not supersede his own work and person, but rather would continue to bless believers with the riches and activity of God that the first disciples had found in Christ, guiding them—and us—“into all the truth” (John 16: 12-15).

The biblical data on the Holy Spirit describe the creative power of the holy, loving God. The Spirit is transcendent, yet personally present to the human spirit. The Holy Spirit is revealed to believers as a principle of life sent to re-energize seemingly lifeless hearts and souls, fashioning and sustaining the created cosmos as well as its inhabitants.

Acknowledgement of the Spirit's power is salutary to humanity. At all times, and increasingly with the centuries, our species has attempted to manipulate the forces of the universe. Through such grasping at power, we threaten to produce chaos and catastrophe. Indeed, this state of affairs is reflected by a world in which one country and a handful of its allies have deliberately dealt a grievous blow to the recognized instruments of international order, peace, and justice by initiating their illegitimate invasion of Iraq.

Surrounded by a world of sin, distortion of truth, pollution of life, and omens of death, we cry out once more for a helper, the Holy Spirit, who alone can vivify and give reality to our worship, work, and witness. It is only as we are thus renewed that we experience the new creation in Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost, for us believers, is a day to celebrate the Holy Spirit, the helper whose coming Jesus promised the disciples. Indeed, God has poured out the Holy Spirit upon all flesh in order that we may be reconciled to God. The events at Pentecost began to reverse what happened at ancient Babel (Gen. 11: 1-9). At Babel, God had confused the languages of the peoples and dispersed the nations abroad in order to hinder the spread of their evil. At Pentecost, worshippers from many nations gathered in Jerusalem. And then it came: an overwhelming manifestation of new life, power, and blessing that Peter recognized as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2: 5-21). Once again, there was bewilderment (Acts 2:6), but this time it came from the fact that everyone heard ordinary men and women, filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking in various languages.

The earliest church knew what it was to be an international, multicultural, and multilingual community. On the Day of Pentecost, people from the farthest reaches of the known world heard the gospel preached, and believed the good news of Jesus Christ. We must never be discouraged in our ecumenical quest and endeavour. The Holy Spirit, the helper, will endow us with the power to love those different from ourselves and will knit us into one family of faith. Though we are a family rich in human diversity, by God's grace we are called to speak with one voice, to care with one heart, and to act in unity. Amen.

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