

We live in a time when the thought of someone breathing on us can send us into a panic. Have they got a fever? Have they been tested for the virus? Have they been exposed but don't yet show symptoms? Have they been part of the people who don't practice safety precautions, or worse, flaunt them rebelliously, with utter disregard for the health of others?

Hearing the words that Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" gives me pause for the first time ever. Today, breathing on someone could be a death sentence! It could cause a violent reaction toward the breather, by the breathee! Strange isn't it, that the very gift that has been with human race since that time in the locked upper room, would not be received today without suspicion, at best, and horror, at the worst.

Fortunately for us, the gift of the Spirit on Pentecost is a done deal. We have never lost that gift. It has never been withdrawn, and is always with us. There may be times when we forget to pay attention to It and times when we might even ignore It intentionally, or times when we choose to deny using the variety of gifts the Spirit given to us and to others, perhaps to ignore or deny the fruits of those gifts as well. The gift of the Spirit persists, in spite of ourselves! Nothing can ever break the promise of Jesus to be with us always in the Spirit. Nothing we can do will end our access to what we have been given. That gift of the Spirit is the Grace that infuses our lives, making all things possible, if we but remember to embrace it.

This is the best time to remember that the one Spirit bequeaths its seven gifts to everyone in various ways. Those gifts of the one Spirit result in twelve fruits. During this time of pandemic we need to recognize the Spirit's gifts in ourselves and in others. Who has words of Wisdom and Knowledge that will sustain us? Are we embracing our faith more deeply? Can we be agents of healing for others even if we aren't doctors or nurses? Do we see the miracles that are happening in this darkened moment in our lives? During this time of pandemic, are we allowing ourselves to feel joy and peace? Are we able to practice patience and kindness, and goodness and gentleness, both with others and ourselves? Are we experiencing the need to live chastely by consuming less, needing less? In the face of the craziness that is rampant in everyday life, in politics, in the senseless acts of racism and bigotry, are we practicing patience and forbearance in how we express our righteous anger and dismay, while still advocating for justice and charity?

Life has become so unfamiliar in so many ways, with the usual becoming dangerous and the expected becoming deadly in too many cases. We are no longer able to breathe in the same space that holds a hug, an arm around a shoulder, a hand holding another's. We are no longer able to sweep up a grandchild into a loving embrace, unthinkingly. We are not longer able to sing God's praises together for fear that our breath will potentially harm another worshiper. Yet, we can all, in what ever way has been given to each of us, embrace Love.

The Holy Spirit in all its gifts and fruits is Love. It is the energy of God. God is Love. When we express Love we are living in the Spirit. Whenever we receive Love we are welcoming God into our lives, consciously. God is Love; the Spirit is Love in action. When we live out the fruits of the Spirit in our lives, we are the expressions of God's love to others. And Love, we have been told, is the greatest of gifts. This is the best of times to be living the Pentecost fulfillment. We are blessed to be able to do so. What better time to celebrate the gift of Jesus' breath on us, than in this worst of times?

Amen!