

052310 THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE BLESSED MOTHER

(There has been no human being greater than Mary
in her receptivity and surrender to the Spirit of God.)

Years ago I made a Retreat at Our Lady of Mount Pocono up in the Pocono Mountains down the street from Mount Airy Lodge. The Retreat House has been around for quite some time but there was a stained glass window that had a depiction of Mary that I had never seen before. Usually Mary is seen with her arms and hands outstretched or holding her Immaculate Heart. In this depiction where the heart of Mary would normally be was the Holy Spirit of God in the form of a dove.

When I asked the sisters why the unusual portrayal they were only too happy to tell me the story behind the stained glass. In the moment of Incarnation when the angel Gabriel came to visit Mary and ask her to be the Mother of God's only begotten son she said her famous "Fiat!" "Let it be done to me as you say!" And then after the Resurrection and Ascension when Mary is gathered in the Upper Room with the disciples and apostles the Holy Spirit descends in power and energy changing frightened hearts into courageous hearts. These are the two most significant outpourings of the Holy Spirit in the history of life on this planet. In each case Mary was not only present she was the catalyst, the one who is responsible for making it happen. There is no more significant person than she when it comes to the receptivity by us as human beings to the workings and promptings of God's Holy Spirit.

In God's design there needs to be another, another person, a partner, someone to respond to the gift of the Holy Spirit in order for the Spirit to be unleashed. Mary is such a person all through her life. This is not a simple piety but an authentic theological fact. It takes two. Even the sending of the Holy Spirit takes two—the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is constantly being sent to us, to indwell the human soul—yours and mine. But it often takes another person to help me to recognize the gift, and to realize that the gift has been offered and to learn how to make the proper response to the gift. In the early days of the Church that person was Jesus' mother, Mary. Listen to what Pope Benedict wrote of her on April 30, 2006:

"In the days that followed the Lord's resurrection, the Apostles stayed together, comforted by Mary's presence, and after the Ascension they persevered with her in prayerful expectation of Pentecost. Our Lady was a Mother and teacher for them, roles which she continues to play for Christians of all times. Every year, at Eastertide, we relive this experience more intensely and, perhaps precisely for this reason, popular tradition has

dedicated to Mary the month of May that normally falls between Easter and Pentecost.

And then on May 26, 2006, he wrote:

In the Upper Room the Apostles did not know what awaited them. They were afraid and worried about their own future. They continued to marvel at the death and resurrection of Jesus and were in anguish at being left on their own after his ascension into Heaven. Mary, 'she who believed in the fulfillment of the Lord's words' (cf. Luke 1: 45), assiduous in prayer alongside the Apostles, taught perseverance in the faith. By her own attitude she convinced them that the Holy Spirit, in his wisdom, knew well the path on which he was leading them, and that consequently they could place their confidence in God, giving themselves to him unreservedly with their talents, their limitations and their future."

Mary was the catalyst for those in the early Church and she continues to be that same catalyst for us today. I believe she does that for me. She opens me to the light of the Holy Spirit. But she is always so gentle. She encourages me to seek the truth and to live in the truth even if I do not always choose to do so. She helps me not to respond in kind when another has wronged me. And when I step over the line and go too far she gently prods me to confession and the Spirit's healing and forgiveness and peace. She bids me not to live in fear or give in to my fears. I pray her rosary and she protects me. The more I pray the rosary the more protected I am. She does not spare me. She cannot, anymore than God can spare me even though I may want him to. She does protect me.

There is no person more attuned to the Holy Spirit than she. So. Pray to her. Ask her to open you to the Holy Spirit who abides deep within you already. Ask her for the help you need to respond favorably to the promptings of the Spirit. My friends, we need each other and need to be able to count on each other for help in this area so that the power of the Spirit may be unleashed. Encourage, support, step up, embrace, lead, dare. It has been given—this Spirit. All we need to live the life of the Spirit is to believe. Let us do that—and begin to live as she lived.