

SERMON OF
ST. THOMAS AQUINAS
FOR THE
FEAST OF THE PENTECOST



Hosted by Thomas Aquinas College
Napa Institute 13th Annual Summer Conference
“What We Need Now: Renewing God’s Presence in our
Lives, in our Church, and in our Culture”

Meritage Resort
Thursday, July 27
8:30 – 9:15 a.m.
Carneros Salons A&B

Sermon for the Day

“Send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created, and
Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.”
— Ps. 103:30)

“Send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created.” Today Holy Mother Church solemnly celebrates the sending of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles—a sending which the Prophet besought, when moved by the Spirit of prophecy he said: “Send forth Thy spirit and they shall be created, and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.” These words give us four things to consider: (1) what is proper to the Holy Spirit Himself, (2) His sending, (3) the power of the one sent, and (4) the matter receptive of this power.

What is proper to the Holy Spirit

First, I say that what is proper to the Holy Spirit is indicated when the prophet says: “Thy Spirit.” Notice that the name “spirit” seems to convey four things: subtleness of substance, perfection of life, impulse of motion, and hidden origin. So, first of all, the name “spirit” seems to convey subtleness of substance. For we are accustomed to call incorporeal substances “spirit.” Similarly, we call subtle bodies such as air or fire “spirit.” Hence, we read in the last chapter of Luke’s Gospel: “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Lk. 24:39). And this is the way that “spirit” is distinguished from things that have heavy matter, things that are composed out of flesh and body. Secondly, the name “spirit” seems to convey perfection of life. For as long as animals have breath [*spiritum*] they are alive, and when their breath leaves them, they perish. “Thou takest away their breath, and they die and return to their dust” (Ps. 103:29). And in Genesis, Noah called into his boat “all flesh in which there was the breath of life [*spiritus uitae*].” Thirdly, the name “spirit” seems to convey impulse of motion, for it is in this way that we give the name “spirit” to winds. And in the Psalms it says about this: “He spoke and there arose a storm of wind [*spiritus*], the winds of storms shall be the portion of their cup.” Men are also said to act “with spirit” when they do something forcefully, as Isaiah has it: “the spirit of the robust, like a whirlwind driving against the wall” (Is. 25:4) Fourthly, the name “spirit” customarily names a hidden origin, as when someone, feeling troubled and not knowing the cause of what is troubling him, attributes it to a “spirit.” So we read in John: “The wind [*spiritus*] blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes” (Jn. 3:8).

In line with these four things, we can seek out what is proper to the Holy Spirit. Proceeding in reverse order, He is called “the Holy Spirit” on account of His being the hidden origin of things, impulse of motion, holiness of life, and subtleness of substance. First, I say that one thing proper to the Holy Spirit is His being the hidden origin of things. Faith teaches us and reason persuades us that all visible and changeable things have a hidden cause. What is that cause? God. Hence the Apostle says: “God is the one who created all things” (Heb. 3:4). It is certain that whatsoever is *other* than God is *created* by God. But in what manner did God create all things? It was not by a natural necessity, as fire burns; rather, He produced all things by His own will: “All things whatsoever that He willed,

He did" (Ps. 113:ii, 3). A craftsman makes a house by will, but is also urged on by necessity or usefulness—say, that he may earn a profit or dwell in that house. But God did not make the world from a will of needy desire, for He does not need our goods. Why, then, did He make the world? Surely not from a needy desire, but from a loving will. Here's a comparison: an artisan who conceives a beautiful house in his mind, not because he needs to build it, but simply loving the house's beauty—that artisan's *love* would bring the house into being. But what is the cause and root of the production of hidden things? Surely love. Hence we read in the Book of Wisdom: "Thou lovest all the things which are, and Thou hast hated none of the things which Thou didst make" (Wis. 11:25). And blessed Dionysius says that "divine love does not allow itself to be without seed." This love is the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the account in Genesis of the beginning of creation says that "the Spirit of the Lord was borne over the waters" (Gen. 1:2), namely, in order to produce matter and bring things into being.

Secondly, "Holy Spirit" conveys impulse of motion. For we see in the world diverse motions: natural motions and, in men and angels, voluntary motions. Where do these diverse motions come from? They must come from a first mover, namely, from God. "Thou shalt change them and they shall be changed" (Ps. 101:27). And God moves by will. But what is the first motion of the will? Surely love. And what sort of activity belongs to love? I say: he who is moved by love rejoices by love over the thing loved and sorrows over what is contrary to it. Hence in the first chapter of Ezekiel we read: "Where the force of the Spirit was," that is, the inclination of divine love, "there they were carried" (Ezek. 1:12). And in truth, all things that are in the world are moved by the Holy Spirit, as the book of Esther testifies when it says: "There is no one who could resist His will" (Esther 13:9). This Holy Spirit whose feast we celebrate today is the source of all motion. Now, some things in the world are moved from within themselves, while some things are moved by others; the living are moved from within themselves, the lifeless are [only] moved by others. The source of *all* motion is alive, rather *is* life. Thus the Holy Spirit, in so far as He is the source of *all* motion, *is* life. "With Thee is the fountain of life" (Ps. 35:10). And because He *is* life, He therefore *gives* life. Great then is the Holy Spirit in all things that are, and move, and live. "In him, we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). All things therefore have motion and being from the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, if we consider the subtleness of substance in the Holy Spirit, we shall see that He is love. And whose love? That of God, and of those who love God. It is of the very nature of [this] love that the Holy Spirit has subtleness of substance. And on the part of the one loved [*amati*], He is the love by which God loves God and by which the Father loves the Son. The Book of Wisdom says: "For there is in her," meaning the wisdom of God, "the spirit of understanding," which makes men understand. In Greek, "holy" signifies cleanness. Truly, the love by which a man loves bodily things is not clean, for since the lover is united by love to that which he loves, the lover is made unclean to the extent that he mixes himself up with such a thing. For just as silver is debased when mixed with an impure metal, so your soul is debased if is mixed up with inferior or lower things by love of them. But when your soul is joined to a higher thing, then the love is called *holy*. Now, there are some who want to be devoted to God and yet who neglect the salvation of their neighbor; such an attitude is not from the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul was solicitous over his neighbor's salvation, for which reason he says: "I have become all things to all men, that I might be of profit to all" (1 Cor. 9:22). Again, there are some who are manifold but deceitful. Not thus is the Holy Spirit, for He is manifold in such a way that He, remaining utterly one, bestows Himself upon diverse things. Again, He is subtle because He makes a man withdraw from earthly things and cling to God. "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life" (Ps. 26:4). "It is good for me to cling to God" (Ps. 72:28).

Fourthly, this Holy Spirit not only gives being, being alive, and being in motion; nay more, He *makes men holy*. Hence the Apostle says: “He was predestined God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness” (Rom. 1:4). No one is holy unless the Holy Spirit makes him holy. And how does He make someone holy? I say: He brings it about that what I have just been describing appears in all whom He makes holy, for He renders them subtle, and contemptuous of temporal things. As it says in John’s Gospel: “Do not love the world nor those things which are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:15). Again, He bestows spiritual life upon those whom He makes holy, as it says in Ezekiel: “Behold I will place the spirit within you, and you shall live” (Ezek. 37:5). The spiritual life owes its very existence to the Holy Spirit. “If you live by the Spirit, walk also by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). Again, the Holy Spirit, who makes people holy, by His own force moves them to work well. “He [the saint] comes as a rushing stream, which the wind [*spiritus*] of the Lord drives forward” (Is. 59:19). Some men are lazy, and these do not seem to be driven by the Holy Spirit. Hence on that verse of Acts, “Suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:2). Again, the Holy Spirit leads them back to the hidden origin through which we are united to God; in the words of Isaiah, “the Spirit of the Lord will carry you away to a place you do not know” (1 Kings 18:12), that is, to the heavenly inheritance. “Thy good Spirit shall lead me into the right land” (Ps. 142:10). What is proper to the Holy Spirit is now clear: He is the origin of living, of being, and of moving.

2. The sending of the Holy Spirit

Let us look into the second [point], namely the sending of the Holy Spirit, which is marvelous and unknown to us, because the Holy Spirit is sent without needing to be sent, without change of Himself, without subjection, and without separation.

I say, first, the Holy Spirit is sent without His needing to be sent. When someone is sent to a place so that an event may happen which could not happen unless he were sent, this would be a sending out of necessity. But this has no place in the sending of the Holy Spirit, whom the Book of Wisdom describes as “having every power, beholding all things” (Wis. 7:23). What, then, is the reason for the sending of the Holy Spirit? *Our* neediness; and the necessity of this neediness of ours comes partly from human nature’s dignity, and partly from its deficiency. For the rational creature excels other creatures because it can actually reach the enjoyment of God, which no other earthly creature can do. “The Lord is my portion, said my soul” (Lam. 3:24). Some seek their portion in this world, such as those who seek worldly honor or dignity. But the Psalmist says: “It is good for me to cling to God” (Ps. 72:28). You should consider that all things that are moved to some end must have something moving them toward that end. Those that are moved to a natural end have a mover in nature; but those that are moved to a supernatural end, namely to the enjoyment of God, must have a supernatural mover. Now, nothing can lead us to our end unless two things are presupposed, for someone is led to an end by two things—knowledge and love. The kind of knowledge in question is supernatural: “No eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it arisen in the heart of man, what God hath prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9). “Never have they heard, nor perceived with ears, nor has eye seen, O God, without Thee, what Thou hast prepared for those who await Thee” (Is. 64:4). Now, whatever a man knows, he knows either by discovering it himself or by learning from another. Vision serves discovery and hearing serves learning, and for this reason it is said that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,” showing that it [the final end] altogether transcends human knowledge. It exceeds human desire, too, and that is why Scripture says: “nor hath it arisen in the heart of man.” How, then, is man led to know it? It was necessary for heavenly secrets to be *made known* to men; it was necessary for the Holy Spirit to be invisibly sent, in order to move man’s affections so that he may tend

toward that end. And thus it says: “Eye hath not seen.” How, then, do we know? “God hath revealed it to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit examineth all things, even the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). “Who would be able to know Thy thought [*sensum*], unless Thou gavest wisdom and sent the Holy Spirit from the Most High?” (Wis. 9:17). Therefore the Holy Spirit is sent not owing to any need of His, but for the sake of our benefit.

Again, the sending takes place without any change in Himself. There is change when a messenger is sent from place to place, but the Holy Spirit is sent without any change of place because He is the true God, unchangeable. “While remaining in Himself, He renews all things” (Wis. 7:27). How, then, is He sent? He *draws us to Himself*, and in that way He is said to be sent, as the sun is said to be sent to someone when he comes to share in the sun’s brightness. So it is with the Holy Spirit, and for this reason Scripture says about uncreated Wisdom: “Send her from the heavens and from the seat of Thy greatness, that she may be with me” (Wis. 9:10). Again: “He hath sent His own Spirit, crying out Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:5). These sendings are diffused “throughout all the nations” (Wis. 7:27) and are carried into holy souls. When the “fullness of time” had come, the Son of God was sent in the flesh (Gal. 4:4), and thus it was becoming that the Holy Spirit, too, be visibly sent—but not in such a way that He took up a created nature into the unity of His Person, as the Son did with human nature.

Again, the Holy Spirit is sent without subjection. Servants are sent by lords because they are subject to them. It was for this reason that certain heretics falsely believed that the Son and the Holy Spirit were lesser than the Father, namely, because they were sent by Him. But the Holy Spirit makes us free, and therefore He is no servant. He is sent by His own judgment, for “the Spirit blows where He wills” (Jn. 3:8), and He is said to be “sent” only on account of the Father’s identity as origin.

3. The effects of the Holy Spirit

Regarding what is set forth in the words of the Psalmist, we are given to understand a twofold effect of the Holy Spirit, namely, creation and renewal: “they shall be created, and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.” If we wish to take these words according as “creation” suggests the production-into-being of the things of nature, the Holy Spirit is in this way the Creator of all things, as Judith says: “Thou didst send forth Thy Spirit, and they were created” (Jud. 16:17). But let us now speak of a different creation. As common usage has it, those who are promoted to a higher state, such as the episcopacy or another dignity, are said to be “created.” In this way all those who are promoted to be sons of God are said to be created, as if to say, promoted. Hence blessed James says: “[Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth] that we might be the beginning of His creation” (Jas. 1:18). The Lord wished to establish a new creature, and so in the Book of Wisdom we read: “God created all things that they might exist” (Wis. 1:14)—namely, in their natural existence; and He willed to *re-create* them, in order that they might exist in the existence of grace. The Apostles were the first fruits of this re-creation. This re-creation is spoken of in Galatians: “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but a *new creature*” (Gal. 6:15).

You should know that this re-creation is made up of steps. It can be looked at, first of all, with respect to the grace of charity; secondly, the wisdom of knowledge; thirdly, the harmony of peace; and fourthly, the constancy of firmness.

Just as you see that when men are brought into natural existence the first thing they obtain is life, so it ought to be the same with the existence of grace. But through what does a man live in the existence of grace? Surely through

charity. “We know that we have been carried over from death into life because we love the brethren” (1 Jn. 3:14). Whoever does not love his brother, regardless of whatever sort of good work he may do, is dead. Charity is the life of the soul, for just as a body lives through its soul, so the soul lives through God, and God dwells in us through charity. “He who abides in charity abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 Jn. 4:16). In today’s Gospel we heard: “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn. 14:23). But the man who does not do the will of God does not perfectly love Him, for “it belongs to friends to will and not will the same thing.” ... Where does this charity in us come from? The Holy Spirit. “The charity of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us” (Rom. 5:5). He who has a share of daylight has that light from the sun; in the same way he who has charity has it from the Holy Spirit. Therefore: “Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created”—namely, in the being of the life of grace, through charity.

You see that men, when they become true lovers, make efforts to know the will of God. “It belongs to friends to have one heart,” as it says in Proverbs, and God reveals His secrets to His friends. And this is the second step of the creation which is from the Holy Spirit: that they [who are re-created] may know God in wisdom. “But I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn. 15:15). Hence, recognition of truth is also from the Holy Spirit ... But He who brings it about that you believe and that you fulfill what you hear, *He* will call things back to mind.” The Holy Spirit does this because he inclines the heart to give assent and to carry out what it hears. Hence our Lord says: “Everyone who has heard and learned from my Father comes to me” (Jn. 6:45).

The third step of creation has to do with concord of peace. St. James distinguishes between earthly and heavenly wisdom, and taking up what is proper to heavenly wisdom he says: “The wisdom which is from above is first of all chaste, then peaceable, modest, easy to be persuaded, consenting to the good, full of mercy and good fruits, without judging, without dissimulation” (Jas. 3:17 ... But what is true peace? Augustine says that peace is “security of mind, tranquility of soul, simplicity of heart, the bond of love, and the fellowship of charity.” Peace has a threefold object: oneself, one’s neighbor, and God. Peace is needed with regard to oneself, so that reason may not be infected by errors or darkened by passions, and concerning this, Augustine says that peace is “security of mind.” There should also be tranquility in affection, and concerning this he says “tranquility of soul.” Again, there should be simplicity in intention, and concerning this he says “simplicity of heart.” Peace toward one’s neighbor is the “bond of love,” and peace with God is the “fellowship of charity.” Is not peace then utterly necessary for us? Surely it is. The Lord made His testament for the sake of peace, and those who do not want to keep the testament cannot receive the inheritance; thus those who do not want to keep peace cannot arrive at the heavenly inheritance. But what if someone were to say: “I want to have peace with God, but not with my neighbor”? The answer: such a thing is impossible. Hence a certain saint says: “No one can have peace with Christ who is out of harmony with a Christian.” Therefore, the third step of creation is the harmony of peace, and so the prophet Isaiah declares: “I have created the fruit of the lips, peace” (Is. 57:19).

The fourth step is constancy of firmness, and this too is from the Holy Spirit. Hence the Apostle says to the Ephesians: “according to the riches of His glory, may He grant you to be strengthened with inner might through His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 3:16). And in Ezekiel: “The Spirit entered into me and I stood upon my feet” (Ezek. 2:2). And in the Gospel: “Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid” (Jn. 14:27). And in the Book of Wisdom: “God created man incorruptible” (Wis. 2:25).

Therefore, the first effect of the Holy Spirit is that He creates.

The second effect is a renewal which consists of four things: grace that cleanses, justice that is ever making progress, wisdom that illuminates, and glory that attains consummation ...

4. The recipient of these effects

But who receives that renewal? “The face of the earth”: that is, the whole world, which at one time was filled with idolatry. Today, the Lord gave to the Apostles the gifts of the charisms. It was of them that the prophet Isaiah said: “They who enter with force,” namely, the force of the Holy Spirit, “from Jacob shall fill the face of the earth with seed” (Is. 27:6). And “face of the earth” refers to the human mind, for just as it is through the face that we see in a bodily manner, so it is through the mind that we see in a spiritual manner, as it says in Genesis: “God created man from the slime of the earth and breathed into his face the breath of life” (Gen. 2:7). But in order that the human mind may receive that renewal, it should have four things: it should be clean, uncovered, directed, and stable and firm.

Of the first, we read in Matthew: “But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face” (Mt. 6:17), namely, with tears of compunction, and then you will be able to receive the renewal of the Holy Spirit. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 50:12).

Secondly, the face of the mind should be open and uncovered. The prophet says: “His face is covered with fatness” (Job 15:27). Some have the face of their mind covered over with the darkness of ignorance. [Job, on the contrary, asserts:] “Darkness has not covered my face” (Job 23:17). And the Apostle: “But we all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face,” namely, a face not covered over by affection for earthly things, “are transformed into the same image from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Thirdly, the face of the mind should be directed toward God, as we read in the prayer: “Now I turn my face toward Thee, and direct my eyes toward Thee” (Tob. 3:14). How do we turn our face toward God? By a right intention; it is thus that we obtain the renewal of the Holy Spirit. Hence it says in the Gospel of Luke: “He will give the good Spirit to those who ask him” (Lk. 11:13). Again, if you are turned [to God] through obedience, He will give the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him. Likewise, we should also turn our face toward our neighbor, as Tobit says to his son: “Do not turn your face away from any poor man, and the face of God will not be turned away from you” (Tob. 4:7). Hence the Apostles received the Holy Spirit when they were *together* (Acts 2:1-4).

Fourthly, the face of the mind should be firm. It is written of Anna, mother of Samuel, “her countenance was no more changed in various ways” (1 Sam. 1:18), and for this reason she received the Holy Spirit. And the book of Job says: “Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure and will not fear” (Job 11:15). The Holy Spirit is given to persons like these. That is why it says in the Gospel: “And eating together with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” But if they had gone away [from Jerusalem], they would not have received the Holy Spirit. “He who perseveres shall be saved” (Mt. 10:22; 24:13). In our prayers today, we shall ask the Lord to grant us this grace of perseverance. Amen.

P. Kwasniewski and J. Holmes collaborated in making the translation; the former wrote the introduction and notes.



California

About Thomas Aquinas College

Thomas Aquinas College was founded in 1971 in California to reestablish genuine Catholic liberal education. In the years since, it has developed a solid reputation for academic excellence. With a growing demand for its unique program, the College opened a second campus in New England in the fall of 2019. On both campuses, students pursue the same, fully integrated curriculum. Instead of reading textbooks, they engage firsthand with the greatest minds in Western civilization – the authors of the Great Books. And rather than listening passively to lectures, they engage in rigorous classroom discussions with their peers in all the major disciplines: mathematics, natural science, literature, philosophy, and theology. The academic life of the college is conducted under the light of the Catholic faith and flourishes within a close-knit community, supported by a vibrant spiritual life.



New England

Genuinely committed to upholding civic virtue and leading lives of service, Thomas Aquinas College graduates enter a wide array of fields, where they are a powerful force for good in the Church and in the culture. Well-versed in rational discourse, they become leaders in law, medicine, education, journalism, public policy, business, technology, and military service. In addition, a steady 10 percent of alumni go on to the priesthood or religious life.