



Feast of the Spirit

In the years I've been bishop my appreciation of Pentecost has deepened considerably, because each spring the Sacrament of Confirmation takes control of my calendar. Night after night I see the Holy Spirit fashion unity out of multiplicity as hundreds of young people come before me to be sealed with the sweet-smelling chrism. As they step away from the center of attention, I say to each of them what the risen Jesus said to His Apostles as He breathed His Spirit upon them that first Easter eve: "Peace be with you." Into each of them that peace will enter in a distinctively different way. But it will be the peace of the One Christ and the One Spirit.

Centuries ago, St. Cyril of Jerusalem pondered Christ's promise to give "a fountain of living water, welling up into eternal life." Why did He use water to describe the grace of the Holy Spirit? Cyril wondered. "Because all things are dependent on water," he answered. "Water comes down from heaven as rain, and although it is always the same itself, it produces many different effects, one in the palm tree, another in the vine, and so on throughout the whole of creation. It does not come down, now as one thing, now as another, but while remaining essentially the same, it adapts itself to the needs of every creature that

receives it." So it is, St. Cyril says, with the working of the Holy Spirit. Like the rain, "the Spirit never changes"; but His grace brings about vastly different effects in those on whom it falls. "His action is different in different people, but the Spirit Himself is always the same."

Christ offered this great Gift of God in its fullness to anyone who would come to Him and drink. "It is everywhere available," St. Hilary notes, "but it is given to each man in proportion to his readiness to receive it. Its presence is the fuller, the greater a man's desire to be worthy of it."

Whether we were confirmed yesterday or years ago, we should always desire to be more worthy of the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God—and not just for our own sake. For, as St. Cyril reminds us, the Holy Spirit "comes to enlighten the mind first of the one who receives Him, and then, through him or her, the minds of others as well." May all of us whose faith in Christ has been sealed by the Spirit live it in a way that confirms the faith of others.