

**May 31, 2020 The Human Tornado Homily:** In the history of motion pictures the tornado scene in “The Wizard of Oz” remains a classic. Given that the film was made in 1938, a time when special effects in movies was largely in its infancy, the technical achievement of filming the challenging scene was truly remarkable. This one scene ended up costing the M.G.M. studio more money than any other special effect. Recall the scene: Dorothy Gale of Kansas, having been knocked unconscious in her bedroom, is swept up in the tornado and later awakens in a strange, foreign land, the kingdom of Oz. The concentrated energy of the twister was enough to lift her house off the ground and send it upwards into the darkened sky.

A tornado (or twister) is a destructive whirling wind accompanied by a funnel shaped cloud that proceeds in a narrow path. With speeds up to three hundred miles per hour it is one of nature’s most powerful forces.

Pentecost is one of the major liturgical feasts of the year. Fifty days after Easter, the day of Our Lord’s Resurrection, this mysterious event of the coming of the Holy Spirit is commemorated. Under the sign of a strong wind, the promised Holy Spirit descended with power on the Apostles. Now the word for “spirit” in both Hebrew and Greek means “breath” and “wind”. In today’s gospel the Holy Spirit is depicted as the breath of the risen Christ. “And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” (JN. 20:22)

In the Book of Genesis, God breathed life into the nostrils of man, the breath of life. At Pentecost, the Lord breathes into our soul the new breath of life, the Holy Spirit. In the upper room where the disciples had awaited the coming of the Spirit, and the very same room in which Jesus celebrated the Last Supper, a mighty wind sweeps through the little group of Jesus’ followers. They each felt a surge of power go through them. They are not changed physically. Instead, they are changed into living instruments of God’s power. Each one is a human tornado, a spiritual dynamo. On that very day of Pentecost, Peter preached with amazing power and extraordinary insight.

In his fine book, “Mere Catholicism”, the English priest Ian Ker, reflects on the profound and enduring effects of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. He writes, “From then on a strange courage and fearlessness seem to possess the disciples. The same disciples who had so often failed to understand when Jesus was with them, who had hidden in terror after His death, who had been amazed and doubtful after his Resurrection right up until the Ascension now suddenly became filled with daring faith, ready to risk death for Jesus, whom they recognize not just to be the Messiah but God Himself. It is only at Pentecost that all doubts disappear”.

In these tumultuous and uncertain times when the Christian faith is noticeably weaker and often attacked from without and within, it is imperative for us to rely on the Holy Spirit. His gifts, including wisdom and courage, give us strength well beyond our natural abilities.

The Church, of which we are members, was born through the breath of Christ, who is the Holy Spirit. As the Church fathers have so often said, “The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church”. Today, Pentecost Sunday is the birthday of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit and the grace he affords us, we all can become “human tornados” and “spiritual dynamos”.

What a major difference we can make if only we let the Holy Spirit, one of the three divine Persons, into our life. His “energy” is needed today in order to renew the face of the earth.

Come Holy Spirit.

Amen!