

The people who heard the disciples at Pentecost were surprised when they heard them speaking languages they couldn't possibly have known. Surprise is what the Holy Spirit uses to get our attention, and it's what we celebrate today at Pentecost. *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia* puts it this way: "...[Pentecost] provides occasion to celebrate all the 'gifts of the Spirit,' which...embrace...surprising new beginnings, unexpected powers, courage,...wisdom beyond the ordinary, love and the like."<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the surprise is to challenge us to recognize God's Spirit living within us, empowering us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, as St. Paul describes them in the fifth chapter of Galatians: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. When we can see these virtues operating in our everyday lives, we can be assured that we're living in harmony with the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead and will one day raise us from the dead, too. I have a little story to tell you that might help you recognize the action of the Holy Spirit in our own times, as the miracles of Pentecost continue to unfold.

Murphy and his wife Drusilla had arrived at an uneasy *modus vivendi* of sorts after many years of marriage. He would ignore her except when there was something to complain about, and she would leave him alone unless he annoyed her. Their patience with one another had vanished over time, giving way to a sullen form of mutual neglect – a living death, if you will. Their friends and relatives could feel the coldness, and rarely came around.

One day Murphy woke up, looked at his wife asleep next to him and wondered, "Is this all there is?" Once upon a time, they had been in love. How had it changed into this? Accustomed to despair, he sighed, got up, and went off to work.

No one at work had ever seen Murphy smile. It wasn't that he was mean or anything, just that there was nothing joyful about him. Earlier that month a new guy had arrived in the office. One

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<sup>1</sup>Glazier & Hellwig, ed., *The Modern New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p.664, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN

of those Christians, Murphy had figured. Always smiling as if there was something worth being joyful about. Always doing something you didn't expect, trying to cheer you up. Murphy had decided he didn't need this pious clown, and avoided him.

So Murphy went to his cubicle that morning, slumped into his seat and realized he'd sat down on something. He got up, turned around and there was a sign with rainbows and butterflies on his chair that said "Have a great day - God loves you!" It was the Christian again. Murphy took the sign, ripped it up loudly and threw it in the trash.

Just then the phone rang. Murphy picked it up and noticed that there was a Post-it note across the handset that said "Smile – God loves you!" Murphy took it off and put it aside, thinking to himself he knew exactly where he was going to stick *that* Post-it note next. It was the receptionist on the phone. She told him his flowers were here, come pick them up. Murphy hadn't ordered any flowers so he told the receptionist there had been a mistake. She said no mistake, they were for him. It was the Christian again, Murphy knew as he headed off to straighten things out.

A cluster of his co-workers stood around the receptionist, including the Christian, so he turned to go down another hallway, but they saw him and called out "Hey Murphy, nice flowers." "Good man," one of the women said, "what a kind thing to do for your wife!"

He looked into their eyes and suddenly saw something he'd never recognized before - something that looked like kindness and compassion, but something that was also waiting for an answer. In that moment, the Spirit grasped Murphy body and soul, shaking him the way an animal shakes something it has caught. Deep within, Murphy saw an offer of unconditional redemption being offered to him, and a power much larger and even deeper urged him to take it. Seized by that power, he saw in a flash that he had voluntarily been a prisoner of something evil for a long time, but that it didn't have to stay that way. He reached out and took the offer. "Oh yeah," he said. "I

forgot I'd ordered them. Thanks." For the first time ever, Murphy gave a little smile. The Christian handed him his flowers.

When Murphy got home that night he put the flowers on the kitchen table. Eventually his wife emerged from the darkness and silently glided into the kitchen to slice some slabs of cold meatloaf for dinner. When she saw the flowers her jaw dropped. "What are these for?" Drusilla asked. "They're for you," Murphy said gently. "Who are they from?" she demanded. "Me," Murphy said. It hurt, but he smiled. "What have you done?" Drusilla said with a squinty eye. "Nothing," Murphy said, controlling himself, "It's just my way of saying 'I love you.'" Drusilla snorted and moved the flowers, and a note fell out. It said "Be at peace – God loves you." Not much changed that night, except that Drusilla warmed up the meatloaf a bit.

As time went on, Murphy followed the urging that kept welling up in his heart. It was, of course, the Holy Spirit at work. Murphy patiently began to do the little things he'd done when he and Drusilla were first married; the small kindnesses that knit a marriage together. Drusilla responded, as the flame of the Holy Spirit lit up her heart, too. They began to use each other's first names again, Bill and Dru. The day came when Bill told a joke and Dru laughed. The laughter surprised them both so much they laughed at each other laughing and didn't stop until they were out of breath. Gradually, word got out and people began to visit again. Joy was returning to the Murphy household.

In time, through the Holy Spirit alive and at work in them and those around them, just as the Spirit works in and through you and me, love and joy replaced the emptiness and despair in their lives; kindness replaced contempt. At the office, nobody said anything out loud, but everyone could see that Bill had embraced the Pentecost gifts that had surprised him that day back then, gifts that had flowed from the Holy Spirit, out through them, into Bill's heart and from his into Dru's. Through the Holy Spirit, and to everyone's surprise, Bill and Dru were back from the dead.