

Pentecost Sunday, Cycle B
Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11
Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34
Galatians 5:16-25
John 20:19-23
May 24, 2015
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On a Friday, not long ago, I had some errands to run in town. When I got back to campus it was past four o'clock, and I had to decide whether or not to return to the office. There was nothing in particular I needed to do in the office, and nine times out of ten I would have called it a week. But this time, for some reason, I decided to go back to the Garaventa Center. A few minutes after I sat down at my desk, the telephone rang. The call was from a dear friend in the UK whose sister had died suddenly. I wouldn't have missed that phone call for the world. Half an hour later, when I had hung up the phone, I thought, "Now I know why I came back to the office. The Holy Spirit guided me here." I imagine some of you are thinking, "It's lovely that you were there to receive your friend's call, but you have to admit that it might have been just a coincidence." Sure, you may be right. I'm perfectly free to think my returning to the office that afternoon was merely a fortunate coincidence. But because, as a Christian, I live by the Spirit and try to be guided by the Spirit, I'm also free to think something more. I am free to think that my choice to return to my desk that afternoon was guided by the very love that creates and sustains the universe.

Now, I know that in any particular instance this belief can be problematic. Years ago, when I was a seminarian, I served as a summer

hall manager at Notre Dame. All that summer the hall was used by outside groups for a succession of conventions and retreats. One such event was a Charismatic Renewal conference. While we were checking people in, one of the delegates came back to the front desk to report that he couldn't get into his room. The key didn't work. I went with him to his door and tried the key myself. Sure enough, no matter how I rattled the handle and twisted the key, the lock refused to work. While I was still struggling with the lock, the fellow said to me, "Don't worry about it son, clearly God doesn't want me to stay in this room tonight." I admit that in the midst of my frustrated efforts, the guy's sublime confidence that the Holy Spirit was taking a hand in his room selection was annoying. I wanted to say, "Look, the locks in this place should have been replaced years ago. They've been giving us trouble all summer." But in retrospect, I can see that it was good that his faith afforded him a way of rising above the kind of petty inconvenience that might otherwise have driven him to distraction.

On this Feast of Pentecost, one might speak at infinite length about the many gifts of the Holy Spirit. Today, I'm thinking about just one. The Hebrew word for spirit is *ruach*, which literally means 'wind' or 'breath.' Christians use the word to name the Holy Spirit. One of the ways to think about this is that as we lean into our lives, the Holy Spirit gives us room to breathe. The Holy Spirit saves us from the debilitating mental and spiritual claustrophobia that can result from experiencing life as one random, meaningless event after another. The Spirit makes it possible for us to understand the things that happen to us, and the choices we make, as part of God's loving providential plan for us and the world. Our life is endowed with an infinite, expansive horizon. Except, perhaps, for the

saints among us, it may be impossible to identify with certainty particular actions of the Holy Spirit in our everyday lives, but the possibility that there is infinitely more going on at a given moment than we realize, is always there. “If we live in the Spirit, Let us also follow the Spirit.” Then, we will live richly and move freely and have our being abundantly in him. Breathe deep!