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Dear Friends,

*“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other languages  
as the spirit gave them ability” Acts 2 v 1-21*

Today is a day of much celebration. Not only do I get to wear vestments at worship in my favourite colour Red, but it is the day when we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit. Both the Jewish and Christian communities celebrate Pentecost, situated 50 days after the Passover and the Resurrection. It is a day of thanksgiving and praise. Some say it is the birth of the body of Christ – the Church – and some may recall their baptism into that mystical body, but we can say today is all about the Spirit.

In our reading today we hear of how Jesus fulfils his promise to the disciples, who receive the gift of the Spirit, the paraclete, or the advocate; that which will enable them and us to continue his mission and preach the Gospel. They are indeed filled with a new wine! The Spirit they received will bring comfort and peace. It will encourage and enable them, and it will work in and through them, we are told.

The Spirit reassures us that we are loved, in spite of our wrong doings. It helps us to look deeply at ourselves. It is not afraid to challenge us, and in times of crisis it provides peace. The spirit breathes life into us when we feel there is no life and no hope. The Spirit is both gentle like a soft breeze and strong like a violent wind, as we hear in today’s reading from Acts.

The reading describes in detail the transformation that took place, as we hear of a noise like a strong wind and tongues of fire that rest upon the disciples. Wind and fire have long been associated with the presence of God in the scriptures. But how do we relate that to today and where do we see this Spirit manifesting itself? You will all have your own ideas on this but, when I hear this reading, it brings to mind times I have spent living in the community at Taizé in the south of France. The place I call my spiritual home.

Taizé is a place that is experienced just like the spirit is experienced. I remember my first pilgrimage trip; it was both beautiful and bewildering. Having been told much about the transformation that people experience in there, it is difficult to enter into it without pre-conceived ideas. But those soon disappear when you arrive, when a sense of peace enters into your very core. For me that is the Spirit. For when we are at peace, we are truly ourselves and from here the Spirit can guide us.

After travelling for many hours, being deprived of sleep and being over stimulated by the excitement of others, I arrived on my first visit, disorientated, exhausted, and confused, but this was short lived as I entered the Church of Reconciliation.

The church at Taizé looks nothing like you have ever seen. It holds a diverse mixture of influences. From the outside it is orthodox in appearance, but inside it is like a series of garage units, which have been added over the years to incorporate the increasing numbers who visit this place. It is a mixture of old and new, of now and then, and in this mixed-up place there is a strong sense of unity and solidarity.



The week consists of bible study, led by the brothers and sisters in the community, group discussion, silence (lots of it!), meditation and worship. In this place, you get the opportunity to explore your own beliefs and the beliefs of others from all over the world. Worship is simple, involving the singing of chants in different languages and the sharing of bread each day. It is simple and powerful. The week culminates in a three-day experience of Easter, veneration of the cross on Friday, a vigil on the Saturday, and on the Sunday, the day of resurrection, when we hear an address from the brothers.

You can imagine the difficulties. Here many people speak many different languages but this seems to fade into the distance when it comes to worship. There is a sense of one Spirit which unites us all and there is nothing more powerful than hearing the Lord's Prayer prayed by others who's native language isn't English. On the Sunday morning we celebrate the Resurrection and, in the evening, we meet together for one last time. Everyone sits in a designated place, depending on your spoken language or mother tongue. Each of the brothers, who speak a variety of languages, speaks to the people. You hear many tongues but there is one clear message. Many voices, but one body, united in purpose, and we return home reminded of the power of the Spirit which unites every nation, every people - a spirit of love. This place is truly a place of hospitality, solidarity, and unity. It can teach much to a divided world.

We have all been given the gift of the Spirit, and it is this Spirit which can enable us to respond in a healing forgiving and reconciling way in our broken world. The Spirit, which is promised to all of us, enables us to reach out to all around us. It helps us to grow and flourish beyond ourselves; to live fully as God intended. Those who allow the Spirit to work within them speak and respond in a way that restores and builds up others.

Our Psalm today speaks of the Spirit renewing the face of the earth. Our world certainly needs this right now, if we are to move from hostility and violence to a world of acceptance and solidarity. Taizé celebrates difference. It basks in unity. It is a place where the Spirit is embraced, nurtured, and its transformative power is valued and present. We are all pilgrimage people led by the Spirit; a Spirit which is placed in every living creature; a Spirit in which we can be united.

## Love in Christ

### Belinda

