

SYMBOLS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We see in Scripture that the Holy Spirit uses everyday things such as fire, wind, water, and oil to show God's presence among his people.

Cloud and light. In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God was present in the light-filled pillar of cloud that led and protected the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land. The cloud also filled the tabernacle, a portable tent that represented the dwelling place of God. In a similar way in the New Testament, a bright, luminous cloud appeared during the Transfiguration of Christ. Both events portray the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Wind. The presence of wind can be refreshing and pleasant. At other times it can be powerful and destructive. Christ referred to this unpredictable quality of wind:

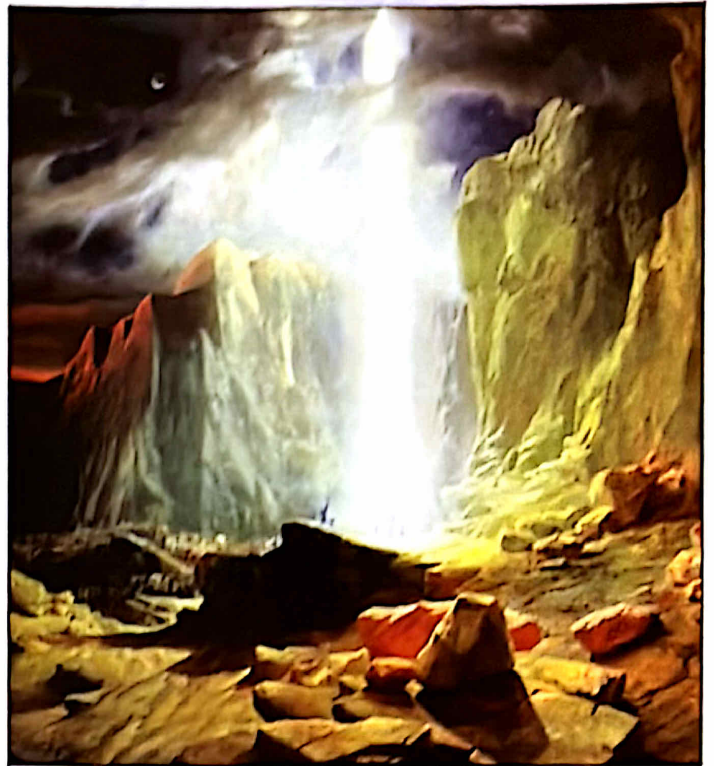
The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit. (Jn 3:8)

Wind is an especially appropriate symbol of the Holy Spirit because of what happened on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles as "the rush of a mighty wind" that "filled all the house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:2).

Fire. The transforming power of the Holy Spirit can be compared to a fire. Fire can destroy, but it can also refine and purify. Its power transforms whatever it touches. Likewise, when a person encounters the Holy Spirit, he or she is transformed. This aspect of the Holy Spirit was notable especially on the day of Pentecost:

There appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:3-4)

Breath. Without breath, we cannot have life—it is essential to our existence. In this image we see the Holy Spirit as "the giver of life" (Nicene Creed). In Genesis we read that God created the first man and "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gn 2:7). This is the Holy Spirit. Christ breathed on his Apostles in order to give them the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins (Jn 20:22-23).



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Water. Water is essential for life; without it life perishes. It refreshes and makes pure. In Baptism, where we first receive the Holy Spirit, water thus represents cleansing and new life. As St. Paul wrote,

By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:13)

Anointing. The action of applying blessed oil is used at both Baptism and Confirmation as well as in Holy Orders and in the Anointing of the Sick. It is a symbol of strength and healing.

A hand. The laying on of hands, which is used in Confirmation and Holy Orders, invokes the Holy Spirit. When the priest extends his hands over the bread and wine at Mass, he asks the Holy Spirit to descend upon the gifts so that they may become the Body and Blood of Christ.

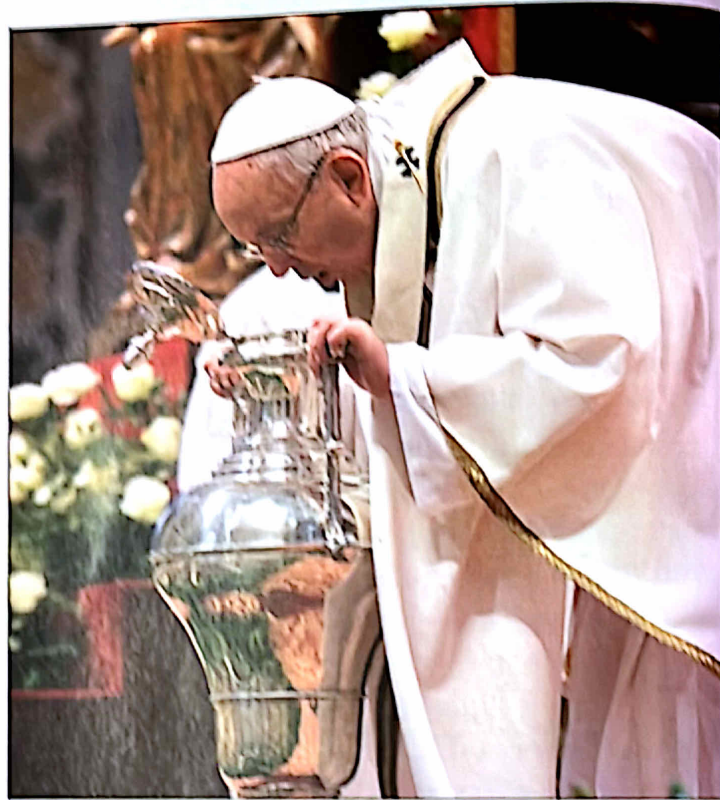
A dove. This image of peace and purity of heart refers to the appearance of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove at the Baptism of the Lord in the Jordan River.

YOU AND YOUR SPONSOR

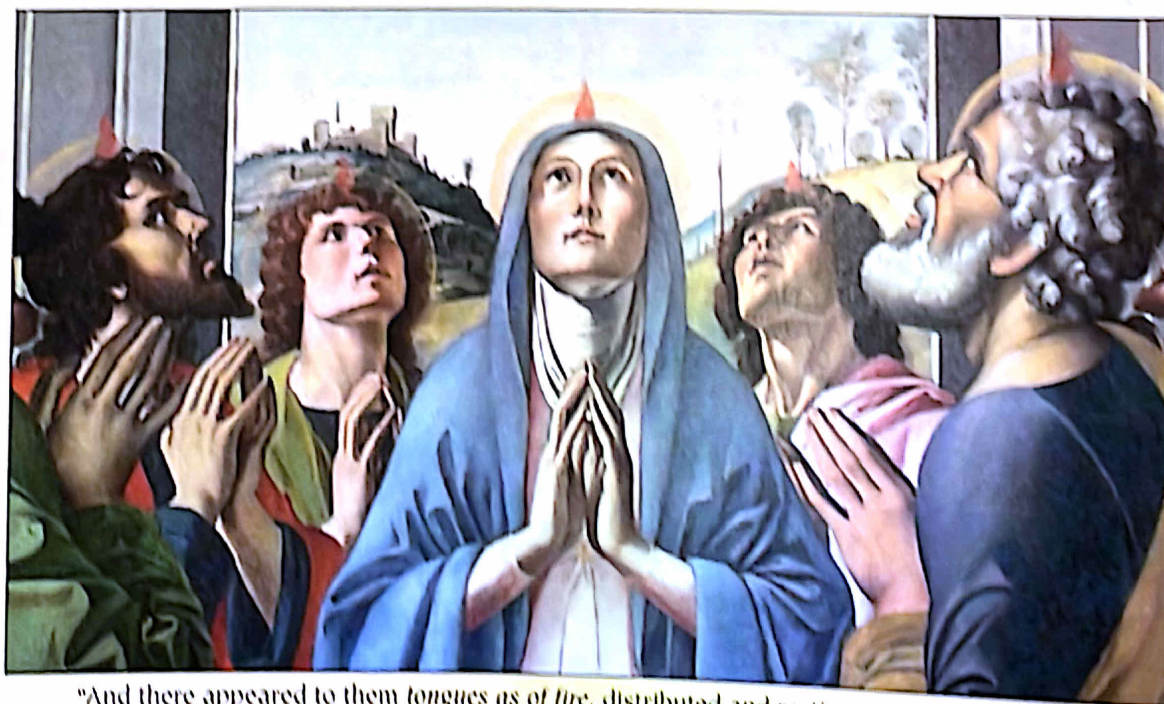
*Talk to your sponsor
about the symbols of the Holy Spirit.*

In this Chapter we read about the different symbols of the Holy Spirit, and we can better understand the role of the Holy Spirit in our Christian lives through some of the symbols associated with him: dove, cloud, light, water, anointing with oil, and others. Get together with your sponsor and talk about which symbols appeal most to each of you. Find passages in the Bible that use that symbol for the Holy Spirit and read them. In your discussion with your sponsor, consider the following questions:

1. What symbol for the Holy Spirit most appeals to you? Why?
2. How is that symbol used in the Bible? Is it used for things other than the Holy Spirit?
3. How does that symbol help you better understand the Holy Spirit and his role in your life?
4. How can you incorporate that symbol in your prayer and/or daily life?



During the Chrism Mass, Pope Francis breathes the Holy Spirit into the Sacred Chrism which will be used in the administration of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders.



"And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit..."