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A painting on the ceiling of St. Catherine Church in Spring Lake, New Jersey, depicts the Holy Spirit descending upon the apostles. (CNS/Octavio Duran)



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"How manifold are your works, O Lord! The earth is full of your creatures!" This is our Pentecost song.

As we pray Psalm 104, we celebrate all of creation as a revelation of God's very being. In "[Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home](#)," Pope Francis tells us, "From the beginning of the world ... the mystery of Christ is at work ... in the natural world as a whole."

Recently, we've seen some concrete signs of our growing awareness of God's universal and inclusive presence. During Lent, [NCR published an explanation](#) that the seeming antisemitism found in the Gospel of John and other New Testament passages cannot justify rejection or the demeaning of the Jewish people at any time in history.

On March 30, the Vatican [repudiated](#) what has been called the "Doctrine of Discovery," papal pronouncements used to justify the expropriation of Indigenous lands and policies of forced assimilation of different ethnic groups into a majority culture. We are making some progress in finding God in all things.

## **Pentecost Sunday**

[May 28, 2023](#)

Acts 2:1-11

Psalm 104

1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

John 20:19-23

Nevertheless, as Pope Francis warns us in [Fratelli Tutti](#), new technologies have proven incapable of eliminating the dread we imagine beyond our walls. He lamented our tendency to fall victim to ancient fears of cultures different from our own.

To wit, on April 10, [The New York Times reported](#) on proposed bills in Florida that would make it a felony to shelter, hire or transport undocumented immigrants and

would require hospitals to report the immigration status of their patients. This seems like what Francis calls fear of people "from whom we must defend ourselves at all costs."

In what sounds like a direct warning to our country, Francis says in *Fratelli Tutti*, "Those who raise walls will end up as slaves within the very walls they have built. They are left without horizons, for they lack this interchange with others."

Today, we celebrate Pentecost, the feast of God's Spirit filling the earth with all her creatures and cultures. To what does this feast invite us?

Beginning with the Gospel of John, we can see the progression of the early church's reflection on the Spirit's effects on the Christian community.

John begins by opening a window on what looks like the room where the disciples had recently celebrated the Passover with Jesus. But now, after his death, they had locked the doors and gathered together in fear.

Without warning, Jesus stood among them and bade them shalom. Showing them the marks of his wounds, he again bade them peace. Then, summarizing what he had said during their last supper and mirroring God's gift of life to the first humans ( [Genesis 2:7](#)), Jesus breathed his Spirit into them and commissioned them to carry on his own vocation.

Luke tells a version of this same story in Acts, describing how the disciples had encountered Jesus over a period of 40 days. Then, after spending 10 days waiting and praying together, the Spirit of God shook them out of all inertia, impelling them to assume their apostleship.

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Thus began an incredible, centurieslong adventure of broadening horizons. Starting with the disciples' amazing experience of being able to tell the Jesus story to Jews "from every nation under heaven," this adventure would continue for centuries, sending disciples to all the peoples and cultures of the world.

Although impelled by the Spirit, this evangelical adventure was never easy. At each new step of the way, Christians needed to broaden their outlook, question their dogmatic assumptions, and ask the Spirit for guidance.

That's the process Paul describes in his first letter to the Corinthians, where he speaks of rejoicing in the Spirit's diverse gifts. Paul teaches that every gift of an individual, a people or a culture manifests the Spirit bestowed for the benefit of the entire body.

Following Paul's lead, Karl Rahner, the great 20th-century theologian, [commented](#) that after the events of Jesus' life and after the Pentecost came to fruition in the "Council of Jerusalem" ([Acts 15:1-31](#)), the next major step for the Christian community did not come until the Second Vatican Council in 1962-65 opened the church to the modern world and all her cultures.

What does Pentecost mean today? In the 21st century, when no part of the world is unreachable and every language is translatable in an instant, Francis tells us in *Fratelli Tutti* that it is time to appreciate the unavoidable "and blessed awareness that we are all part of one another" and can "no longer think in terms of 'them' and 'those,' but only 'us.' "

As we celebrate God's Spirit present throughout creation, let us abandon our locked-up mentalities and venture into mind and soul-stretching interchanges with the wild and wonderful variety of the Spirit's manifestations in our world. Pentecost is ongoing!

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