

**The Feast of Pentecost, May 23, 2021**

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**The Power of the Holy Spirit**

Ezekiel 37:1–14

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*


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**The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And He led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O LORD God, you know.”** (vv 1–3)

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No matter how you slice it, the last fourteen months have been difficult. At times we’ve all felt weary and lifeless, frustrated and without hope. Finally, however, life really does appear to be returning to normal, or something like it. Boys are playing baseball without masks. Family and friends are able to visit nursing home residents—in their rooms! Graduations, summer trips, and weddings are taking place as planned. For some, these changes create nervousness, but, for many, it’s like life has been breathed back into us.

It seems fitting that this is happening as we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. Today we rejoice in the power of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus pours out on the Church from heaven. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and giver of life—the giver of life that isn’t just a return to the same old, same old but of life that’s way better than normal ever was, of life eternal.

## THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS SEEN

- I. IN THE KIND OF PEOPLE HE WORKS WITH
- II. AND IN MAKING THOSE PEOPLE WHOLLY ALIVE.

## I.

The Spirit’s power is seen in the kind of people He works with. What kind of people are they? They aren’t the best and the brightest. They aren’t the beautiful and the successful. They aren’t the movers and shakers in society. They are fishermen from Galilee, sons and daughters, young men and old, male servants and female servants—these are the people on whom the Spirit is poured out. Even more vivid, however, is the

vision received by the prophet Ezekiel when he was **brought out in the Spirit of the LORD and set down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones, very dry bones** (vv 1, 2). The kind of people the Spirit works with are like dry bones—without life, health, or strength of their own.

Who is like dry bones? In Ezekiel’s day, the captive Israelites felt like dry bones. They were saying, **“Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off”** (v 11). Why? The Babylonians had burned Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, deposed the king, and dragged off their sons and daughters to a strange land. Hope was gone. Their lives were as good as over. They had no future—no future except that of dry, dusty bones piled high in the middle of a valley. The wages of sin is death. For too long they’d been borrowing against their payday, and now their payday had come.

But it doesn’t take actual chains to make people feel like dry bones. Many people today feel that way, too. They are confused. Their lives have crumbled and are in disarray. They see no reason for living and no hope in dying. Still others, though they are outwardly successful, are really no more alive than dry bones lying on a valley floor. They “have it all” or “have it all together,” at least in the eyes of the world, and yet have no life in them.

We are like dry bones. That what St. Paul says about us because of our natural birth. Dry bones are our inheritance from Adam and Eve. **You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked** (Eph 2:1). The truth is that **we were all dead in our trespasses** (Eph 2:5). None of us had any more power to come alive than scattered bones in a valley. Life never comes from non-life. Never. Even as Christians, we sometimes feel more dead than alive. We so easily get wrapped up in ourselves that we forget others in need. We sit stewing over the wrongs done to us and take it out on those around us. We so often fail to read God’s Word, to let His love have its way with us, and to pray. The world so silently and stealthily lures us from God into the valley of death.

But here we see the power of the Holy Spirit. What the Holy Spirit has to work with isn’t much—dry bones, people who are dry bones, people who sometimes feel like dry bones. What can we make out of dry bones? A skeleton, maybe, but not much. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, can make much of dry bones.

## II.

The Spirit’s power is seen in making people alive, wholly alive. He starts with a valley of dry bones and ends with living, breathing people who **stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army** (v 10).

How can the Spirit do this? He makes people alive through the Word, through the living and abiding Word of God. Ezekiel didn't know whether the dead bones of the captive Israelites could live, he might've been pretty sure that they would never live, but God knew. The Lord said to him, **"Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord"** (v 4). Speaking to dry bones might seem like a waste of time. It's true that our words would have no effect. But God's Word isn't powerless and ineffective. By His Word, He created the heavens and the earth. He formed man from the dust of the earth. He breathed into His nostrils the breath of life. His Word doesn't return empty or void. The Word of God is the vehicle and instrument of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said, **"It is the Spirit who gives life. . . . The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life"** (Jn 6:63).

By the power of the Spirit in the Word, we are made alive. This is what Ezekiel was told: **"Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the LORD God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and the breathe on these slain, that they may live"** (v 9). Wherever the Word is spoken—to the north, south, east, or west—there the wind of the Spirit blows. It gives life and breath. Jesus says that the work of the Spirit is mysterious—like the wind. We cannot understand it, yet the Spirit gives life. As Jesus said of the Spirit, **"He will take what is mine and declare it to you"** (Jn 16:14). What belongs to Jesus? Rescue from death and the devil. The forgiveness of sins and salvation. The life of the world to come. Where God's Word is, there is life, because the Spirit is there and He gives to us what belongs to Jesus. Jesus walked out of the grave with life, and this is the life that the Spirit gives to us. He does this through the Word—even through the Word joined to the water of Holy Baptism. You have been made alive with Christ. You have a new existence. The world is one big valley of dry bones, but where the Spirit breathes on those bones, they come alive forever!

The power of the Spirit in the Word also keeps us alive. God promised His people Israel, **"I will put My Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD"** (v 14). When we feel more dead than alive because we fall short of the glory of God and our faith and love are lacking, the Spirit leads us to repentance. He renews our faith in God's forgiveness. When we are burdened with difficulties that cause us to wonder if we can stay alive, the Spirit points us to our source of strength in God. He leads us back to Christ, to the One who became was laid low in the grave but walked out alive, who lives and reigns and pours out His Spirit through His Word.

So we see that the power of the Holy Spirit is very great—not only for the Israelites of old but also for us. Look at the kind of people He has to work with! Look at what He does to them! As they lived again, so the Spirit of God has made us alive and keeps us alive. What can He do with dry bones? He can make a people, a host, an assembly of living ones who stand before the throne of God, **clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and** singing the praises of the God who gave them new life and saved them (Rev 7:9, 10). The Spirit has already given us this new life. He has made us alive with Christ. On the Last Day, He will also raise us from our graves and place us in the heavenly land. There we shall be wholly alive by the power of the Holy Spirit forever.

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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