



## *Choosing Solidarity as a Way of Life*

An alternative to worldly individualism

By Chuck Hornsby



For the last couple of months, we have been talking about ways that we can be faithful to our call to build an alternate society. We believe that this is a mandate from God who has called us and loves us. It is one of the specific ways that we can fulfill the great commandment to love God with our whole heart and our neighbor as our self. Being an alternate society is hard work. We live in a culture that is very effective in passing on its sense of how things are, and how things should be. Without a vigorous effort at living intentionally, we will simply slide into the cultural norm and be perhaps a perfumed version of the world around us. If we are not careful, we will still have the underlying stench mildly disguised by a pious deodorant.

Three initial things are necessary if we are to avoid this trap. First, we must REPENT. There are some things of the world, the flesh and the devil that we hold on to because we want to. Sometimes we choose sin over

godliness because we prefer it. Some of our choices are simply tainted by our fallen nature, and there is no way to go forward except to repent and change.

Secondly, we must be willing to RENOUNCE some good things for the sake of other good things. It is not always sin that blocks us from being an alternate society. Sometimes we simply pursue good things that we value because we like them and we want to. In and of themselves, they are not evil or sinful... they simply block us from God's call on our life. The story of the rich young man in scripture shows us this principle. His money was not in and of itself evil, but his unwillingness to renounce it kept him from following Jesus.

Finally, we need to RECEIVE. We as individuals and we as a community can never think we have arrived. We always are in need of more of the grace that God has for us. For us to be a true alternative to the world's counterfeit, we must have more and

more of what is real. We must receive more and more of the Holy Spirit. So to live as a real alternative to the world, we must repent, renounce and receive.

The focus of this week's article deals mostly with the second area. If we are to live in solidarity, we must renounce many good things out of our own free choosing, so that we can be a people with a particular scent that is a clear alternative to the world around us. Being a community not only requires us to choose to give up bad things, it allows us to choose to give up good things for the sake of a purpose.

We have decided to do something together — build community. But that one decision is really a series of ongoing decisions where we focus our free will to a particular end. Building community doesn't take away our freedom, but it does require us to go beyond our own wants, opinions and

# Solidarity

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needs to do something together. I am free to use my money as I please, but if we are to be an alternative society, some of it must go to our common work. I am free to use my time as I please, but if we are to be an alternative society, some of it must be spent together. I am free to raise my children as I choose, but if we are to be an alternative community, other people's children must be taken into account. We do not live in isolation, and we cannot make individual choices without affecting others. I am free to dress as I please, but I can freely choose to modify that to be part of a people who give a particular kind of witness. I am free to associate with whomever I please, but I can choose to go beyond my personal preferences and friendships to build an intentional extended family. I am free to exercise my religion according to my church's doctrine, but I can choose to exercise it with sensitivity to people who follow some different doctrinal dictates.

Many of these decisions are directed by specific agreements we have made in becoming members of Alleluia. Direction for other decisions are alluded to in principle in things like the Alleluia Covenant and the Alleluia Rule of Life. These are given without specific definition leaving us free to determine how we are to live out these principles in specific situations. In these areas, it is prudent to consider seeking out good counsel so that selfishness and independence don't color our choices. Other choices require spur of the moment decisions that can only be guided by our commitment to make love primary.

We have the right to choose to do something different than we want to so that we can live in solidarity and

# When God Sends Forth His Spirit

By Fr. Joseph Norris

EDITOR: This sermon was given on Pentecost Sunday, May 15, 2005, but is important to us as we strive to live as an alternate society in today's world.

On July 4, 1776, the members of the Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia signed the Declaration of Independence. With this action, the American Revolution was launched and a new nation was born. It is ironic that on that very day George III, King of England, made this entry in his diary: "Nothing of any importance happened today."

On the day of Pentecost, in the year A.D. 33, 120 followers of a man named Jesus were gathered together in Jerusalem. Suddenly the Spirit of God filled each one of them and marked them with tongues of fire. On that day the Church was born. But no secular historian of the time saw anything significant in that event.

Those 120 disciples were just a handful of rather ordinary men and women, a few fishermen, a couple of housewives, a former tax collector, a few farmers and some servant girls. Yet through these ordinary people God built a Church which has lasted now for over 2,000 years. In less than 300 years, that small, insignificant Jewish sect became the official religion of the entire Roman Empire and today the Church of Jesus Christ circles the globe and numbers some one billion members.

How did they do it? What happened to those 120 followers in the year 33 A.D. on the day we call Pentecost? Those 120 followers came in contact with the Christian's unknown God. Yes, that is right, those 120 followers came in contact with the Christian's unknown God. They came

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be an alternative society. I come from a state that is famous for its independence. We brag that we were once a country and that we could have been five states if we had so chosen. We brag that we would be the largest state if we simply melted all the ice in Alaska. I was raised in the 60's where the breaking of every social norm was often seen as a virtue. We live in a country whose national holiday is called Independence Day. Being independent thinkers is sometimes seen as the ultimate virtue. But we have the right to focus our independence, that beautiful God given gift of free will, to build an alternative society. OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME. THY KINGDOM COME, *THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAV-*

EN.

How do I need to focus my free will for the sake of the kingdom? What do I need to renounce for the sake of living in solidarity? How can I overcome the vice of worldly independence while exercising the virtue of free will?

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# Live in the Power of God's Spirit



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in contact with God's Spirit, or the Holy Spirit. For many Christians the events of Pentecost, the events of God's spirit coming to this earth is like what King George said on the day the Declaration of Independence was signed, "nothing of any importance happened today."

...[Pentecost is] one of the four major festivals of the church year. We celebrate the coming of God's spirit, the Holy Spirit into the lives of men and women. ...We celebrate the birthday of the church. [Pentecost] is just as important as Christmas, just as important as Easter, just as important as the festival of the Ascension, but for some unknown reason, this festival, this holiday in the church year goes by almost unnoticed. Why is that?

Maybe because we have a difficult time getting a handle on the Spirit of God. Maybe, we don't understand what exactly happened on this day. And maybe, talk about the Spirit is not so sweet as talk about a baby born in a manger, angels singing in the heavens, gifts being passed about and shepherds tending their sheep on quiet hillsides.

Maybe Pentecost doesn't get so

much attention because we have not found a way to commercialize it, we don't turn Pentecost into a culture extravaganza, or into a national holiday, so it goes unnoticed.

But, this festival, this holiday is very important for the life of the church, for your life and mine. The Spirit of God is not something we should fear, nor something we should ignore, but the Holy Spirit is God's presence in this world. It is the same presence that was moving over the face of the earth when God created this world in which we live. It is that same presence that gave life to a baby born in a manger in Bethlehem. It is the same Spirit of God that walked the earth for 33 years, teaching, healing, proclaiming the love of God for all people. And now, today, it is that same spirit that is with us, it is God's spirit alive and well on this earth, working through His people, the church, to bring His love into the brokenness of this world.

The source of the Holy Spirit is God. We believe in the Trinity, God the Father who creates, God the Son who redeems and God the Holy Spirit who gathers, calls, enlightens and makes his people holy. God is one, but at the same time He shows himself in three different ways. It is this third part of the Trinity, this third manifestation of God that we celebrate on [the] day of Pentecost.

Jesus talks about the Counselor coming to lead the disciples in truth and to convict the world of sin and to bring God's righteousness into the lives of people who have experienced the brokenness of this world. This spirit is in each of our lives. God's spirit comes to us in our Baptism and Confirmation and remains with us as we grow in the knowledge and truth

of the God who loves us. The power of God's Spirit came to earth on Pentecost.

Power can be used in at least two ways: it can be unleashed, or it can be harnessed. The energy in ten gallons of gasoline, for instance, can be released explosively by dropping a lighted match into the can. Or it can be channeled through the engine of a Ford in a controlled burn and used to transport a person hundreds of miles. Explosions are spectacular, but controlled burns have lasting effect, staying power. The Holy Spirit works both ways. At Pentecost, He exploded on the scene; His presence was like "tongues of fire" (Acts 2:3). Thousands were affected by one burst of God's power. But He also works through the church—the institution God began to tap the Holy Spirit's power for the long haul. Through Word and Sacraments, Christians are provided with staying power.

Through our baptism ..., we have obtained the staying power of God to see us through all the ups and downs of life. The Spirit of God comes to us in our baptism, and remains with us, calling us to worship, bringing us to service, gathering us together as a body, enlightening us about the truth of God and continually making us holy before God. All this happens day in and day out in our lives. This spirit is quietly at work each day you live. The Spirit is there with you as you plant your corn, beans and oats. It is there with you as you manage your business, as you raise your family, as you work for another person. This spirit of God is there in all that we do. The Holy Spirit brings His power into our lives in a quiet and unob-

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# The Holy Spirit is an Untapped Force in Our Lives

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trusive way.

God's Holy Spirit is like the tide, it comes quietly, it comes in slowly, but it comes to us with enough power so that we might do the job God has called, led each of us to do. There is a power, a force and for many an untapped force in each of our lives, that is the Holy Spirit. Many times it is not dramatic, it does not cause us to do dramatic things, but it is there to give us the power to live the kind of lives, to be the kind of people that God intended us to be.

The nature of this spirit empowers us to live lives that point to Christ. The kind of life God intends for us to live points not to us, not to our accomplishments, but to the Lord of Life, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit works with our spirit so that we might experience the righteousness of Christ in our lives. It is this spirit that convicts us of our sins, shows us that we really aren't as good as we think we are and then in that realization, we fall on our knees at the foot of the cross begging for Christ's mercy, and it is that same Spirit who comes with that mercy, with the righteousness of God and washes away' our sins. Paul says in Romans, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of

God. For you did not receive the Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the spirit of adoption. When we cry Abba Father it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

It is this Spirit that comes into our lives, into the church to allow us to spread God's message of love to all people. It is this Spirit which points not to itself, but to Christ. It is this Spirit which allows us to point not to ourselves, but to Christ. It is this Spirit which makes the church, the Body of Christ, the most unique organism on the face of the earth.

We run hospitals, feeding stations, crisis pregnancy centers, universities, publishing houses, and nursing homes. We care for our clients from birth to death.

We are into life insurance and fire insurance. We perform spiritual heart transplants. Our original Organizer owns all the real estate on earth plus an assortment of galaxies and constellations. He knows everything and lives everywhere. Our product is free for the asking.

Our CEO was born in a back-water town, worked as a carpenter, didn't own a home, was misunderstood by His family, hated by enemies, walked on water, was condemned to death without a trial, and arose from the dead and we can talk with Him everyday.

The power of the Holy Spirit was brought into the world... over 2000 years ago, and that power is still present today through us and within the church.

The power of God can invade the body, inflate the mind, swell the soul, lift the spirits and make us more than we ever imagined. It'll make you

young when you're old, and it'll make you live even when you die. The power and presence of the Spirit will disturb, delight, deliver and lift.

When God sends forth the Spirit, "the whole face of the earth is renewed." When God sends forth the Spirit, chaos is changed into creation, the Red Sea opens up to a highway of freedom. When God sends forth the Spirit, a young woman says "Yes". Jesus is born and life is never the same.

When God sends forth the Spirit, amazing things happen: barriers are broken, communities are formed, opposites are reconciled, unity is established, disease is cured, addiction is broken, cities are renewed, races are reconciled, hope is established, people are blessed, and church happens.

Today the Spirit of God is present. So be ready, get ready ... God is up to something. Discouraged folks, cheer up. Dishonest folks, 'fess up. Sour folks, sweeten up. Closed-minded folks, open up. Gossipers shut up. Conflicted folks, make up. Sleeping folks, wake up. Lukewarm folk, fire up. Dry bones, shake up, and pew potatoes, stand up! But most of all, Christ the Savior of all the world is lifted up.



Fr. Joseph Norris was the Adult Education Director at St. Mary's Help of Christians Catholic Church in Aiken, South Carolina from 2001-2005. He has since passed away.

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