

*Today's situation, the challenges of the last fifty years  
and a more profound understanding of the faith  
have brought us face to face with new realities,  
as I said in my inaugural address to the Council.  
It is not the Gospel that has changed. No, we are the ones  
who are just now beginning to understand it better ...*  
- John XXIII

**O**N THE FEAST OF THE ASCENSION, MAY 23, 1963, JUST days before he died, Pope John rose from bed and addressed the above words to two friends who were papal diplomats.

With the celebration of Pentecost and marking the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of Vatican Council II this year, we are recalling the importance of this Council as a Pentecost event for the life of the church and for our own monastic life.

Weston Priory was founded with the arrival of the first monks in 1953, just nine years before the opening of the Council. The winds of the Spirit were already moving. During the decades that led up to the Council the liturgical movement, an ecumenical awakening, monastic renewal, and a growing consciousness of the important role of the laity in the church had a profound effect on our brother and founder, Abbot Leo, along with the nascent-emerging community that has become Weston Priory.

This was a time of transition in which the rumblings of the Spirit were felt and imbibed. Certainly, like the early disciple community, there was doubt and fear and hesitancy; yet there was also the fresh breath of springtime filling the air.

In Greek as well as in the Chinese language, transitions are times of “*crises/crises*,” that is, precarious and perilous times but also crucial moments that bring new opportunities for growth and deepening vision. As Pope John XXIII reflected, it was truly a time to begin to better understand the Gospel and to learn the meaning and cost of discipleship in ways not yet anticipated.

These past fifty or more years have been times to experience the foundations tremble and what was thought to be staid, unchanging postures to be freed from their unquestioning shackles. The wind and fire and vibrations of the Spirit were blowing and loosening what seemed so tightly bound. A time of new vision and hope was emerging. And Peter proclaims this vision in his Pentecost sermon of Acts 2, echoing the Hebrew prophet Joel (3: 1-3):

*I shall pour out my Spirit on all humanity.  
Your sons and daughters shall prophesy,  
your young people see visions,  
your old people dream dreams.  
Even on the slaves, men and women,  
shall I pour out my Spirit ...*

Today many question the direction and religious consciousness of society with fear that it is waning. However, could these “signs of the times” be signaling new movements of the Spirit as people of this age search for God? Possibly they are not seeking formal definitions, but are responding as Pope John XXIII invited “to let go in God and let God be God!” Are we free enough to trust the disturbing movements of the Spirit beyond fixed institutional forms? Can we hear the Spirit “groaning” within all creation? The voice of God’s Spirit echoes deep within the heart of each and every one of us. A body has many different parts, yet each plays an important and unique role to create the integrity of the whole body. Must we not listen and encourage everyone to speak the word that is incarnate among us? Called to live the deep mystery of God’s Spirit, we are bidden in humility to repent the tendency to presume that we fully know and understand this mystery.

In this issue of the bulletin, our brothers reflect on past and present transitions in their/our life as community and recognize the risks and opportunities for growth and new vision. We have been blessed in these past few months by a trip to Mexico to be with our Benedictine Sisters and the struggles of their people. During Holy Week and Easter three of our Mexican Sisters came to celebrate with us. Following their visit, three Trinitarian Nuns of Suesa (Cantabria, Spain) graced us with their presence for ten days during the Easter season. Likewise, so many of you, especially the religious women in the church today, have gifted us in hope for on-going renewal as together we listen attentively for movements of the Spirit. You are the life-giving signs and sacraments of the Spirit’s breath incarnated among us.

When John XXIII addressed the Council for the last time, he encouraged the church community not to be discouraged by our differences or overly perturbed by our disagreements; these can be an overflowing source of God’s Spirit. He urged us to take time to listen to one another, to look into each other’s eyes so that we can come to know and understand each other’s hearts.

We are continually living transitions: opportunities and vibrant signs of the Spirit’s abiding presence always breathing anew the wind, fire, tongues and voices of Pentecost! ■

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Sources: ■ Christian Feldman, *Pope John XXIII: A Spiritual Biography*, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000.

■ Thomas Cahill, *Pope John XXIII*, New York: Penguin Putman Inc., 2002.