

Loving God, You pour out the spirit of grace and providence on all. Deliver us from cold hearts, and wandering thoughts, that with steady and attentive minds, we may worship you in spirit and in truth. Amen.

As I read through this chapter and its exploration of the persons of God, I can imagine Jesus feeling quite compelled in this moment. Looking at his disciples, “If any of you love me, keep my word. We will come to you and make our home with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷My peace I give to you.” Christ conveys the peace of God in the person of the Holy Spirit. The peace of an indwelling God of creation and communion. And the Spirit is not merely within us, but among us. I feel the presence of God in this room each Sunday as the rising sun streams through the windows and fills the sanctuary with light. We sit as family led as one by the Spirit to share in the peace of Christ.

Elsewhere in this chapter, speaking of the Spirit, Jesus says, “You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” This ever-present God works ceaselessly, and to any reach for the sake of providence. Through the working of the Spirit, God provides all things, from wisdom, to faith, from goodness, to inspiration. And we know this person of God. We perceive this presence. We feel the pride of a loving parent when we struggle to do what is right. We feel the love of a steadfast companion in our moments of deepest loneliness. And when we fight to shut it out, the Spirit waits patiently for us to turn. To receive God’s ever flowing peace.

Between translations and interpretations of this text, the Spirit is called by several names. Each seeks to express an attribute of God. The advocate, the counselor, the helper. I would add, the comforter. Through the Spirit we are given God’s counsel and comforting in times of struggle. Our understanding comes through the loving, peace-bringing, indwelling God which is the Holy Spirit. This highest counselor, our Holy Advocate, teaches and guides speaking within about what is true and what is right. The text tells us that the Spirit will teach us everything and remind us of all that Jesus has said. It is through this that we receive the gift of reassurance that the teachings of Jesus are the Living Word of God. We are called to love one another and to walk in the footsteps of Christ.

The Spirit is an advocate to the oppressed. Oppression is the product of division and inequality. When differences become weaponized. When opportunities are available for some and withheld from others. When resources are used without thought to how they will be sustained. In places of oppression, the Spirit is working to lift up and reinforce. The Spirit will empower voices to speak, and hands to create. The Spirit will open eyes and shift perspectives.

The Spirit is a counselor to the discerning. Those who pray for the guidance to seek a path. The counselor of the Holy Spirit is with us when we leave ourselves behind and seek our calling. In the first letter to the Corinthians, chapter two, verse 12, Paul writes, "Now we have received not the Spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God." The discerning of one's gifts is not a searching for a thing we seek to become, but a stilling of one's desire, to allow the work of the Spirit to lead one to purpose. Newly each day, the Spirit works in us to create the goodness and light which is God's plan for us all.

The Spirit is a comforter to the suffering. Suffering is the consequence of unmet needs for basic elements of life. Sustenance, shelter, companionship, and safety. We suffer when we love, for all kinship, while pure and God gifted, is temporary. We suffer when we serve as our efforts are met by the limitation of our own abilities. In times of tragedy, we may refuse God's peace. Turning our back on what we perceive is the cause of our suffering. The Holy Spirit is a person of God which is pure love. Even more in times of the greatest change, the Holy Advocate is working for our wellness. Our wholeness. Our joy.

I find the Spirit brings peace and joy into my life as I work in my garden. Are you familiar with English gardens? Neatly organized and meticulously maintained. This is the opposite of what I have. My gardens are more of an only the strong survive kind of situation. My favorite flowers are those which are unstoppable. Poppies and lupine, columbine and lamb's ear. Each year they return to being stronger than the year before. All around the base of each strong plant are the tiny sprouts from the hundreds of seeds left the season before. The poppy seeds are nearly countless. The lupines, in addition to their seeds make tiny nodules that break off and germinate even if you tear the roots from the ground. All of them are capable of surviving fire and flood. They spread and cultivate, turning rocky ground into

soil. Once you welcome them in, they will stay for generations spreading their joy, and irritation, at the start of each new spring.

The Holy Spirit is more perennial, more inspiring, and more beautiful. As we walk in the way of the Spirit, with our eyes open to grace and our hands spread out in service, we leave behind seeds and roots which grow the presence of God within the hearts of those we meet. When we embrace the Holy Spirit, tangible, observable and ever-present, we learn of Christ's way, we are called to God's service, and we live as a blossom of goodness for the welcoming of our brothers and sisters. We are gifted God's peace, not because our faith is unwavering, but because we are loved, as we have always been and will always be.

Let us turn to God in prayer. Spirit of the Living God, we turn within to You. Enlighten us, guide us, strengthen us, console us. We give you thanks for your everlasting presence. We quiet our desires within and offer you ourselves. Pour out your grace and your peace on all souls. That we may grow together in your name. Amen.