



Rob and Sharla Walsh  
Provincial Couple  
Teams of Our Lady  
[emmettwalsh@me.com](mailto:emmettwalsh@me.com)  
503-939-8577

## “Veni, Come”

### Letter 49

Fr. Henri Caffarel

being present to God; Letters on Prayer

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You ask whether we must pray to the Holy Spirit. Run through your missal. It will give you the answer by way of admirable prayers to the Third Person of the Trinity. Among others, the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (*Come, thou Holy Spirit, come!*), the Sequence of the Mass, and the *Veni Creator* (*Creator Spirit, come*). The *Veni Creator* is the hymn that the Church invites us to sing on solemn occasions, such as the opening of great church assemblies.

You probably know the other *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (*Come, Holy Spirit*). I, for one, recited it thousands of times in school—before our noisy English classes and before our mortally boring math classes. I hate myself for not even suspecting the richness of the words I was pronouncing.

*Veni, Come*. That is how these prayers begin. Their first word is addressed to the One whose presence we desire within us. And it is indeed God’s will that the Holy Spirit be or guest, that we be his temple (cf. Rm 8:9; I Cor 3:16; I Cor 6:19).

Prayers addressed specifically to the Person of the Holy Spirit are less frequent in our Latin liturgy than they are in the East. But what do our prayers to Christ and to the Father ask basically, if not the gift of the Holy Spirit? It is the object of the divine promises throughout the history of the people of God. Is not all prayer ordered to our sanctification? Now, it is the Holy Spirit who makes sons and daughters of God out of us. He fashions within us filial souls, from which rise the cry of tenderness and trust: “*Abba! Father!*” (cf. Rm 8:14-15).

In our prayer to the Holy Spirit, we cry out to him: *Veni*. When we address Christ or the Father, we ask of them: *Emitte*. Send the Holy Spirit. Send to us, send within us, the Spirit who alone can re-form us, according to Ezekiel’s admirable prophesy: “*I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my Spirit within you and make you live by my statutes*” (Ezk 36:26-27).

Not only every individual person, but the entire universe will be renewed by his coming. A short verse from the liturgy of Pentecost expresses it splendidly: *“Send forth your Spirit, and all things will be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth.”*

Do I need to insist anymore, to convince you anymore that you ought to pray to the Holy Spirit?

I wonder whether the difficulty you have in praying to him does not stem from the fact that you seek him as someone exterior to yourself, when he is right there inside of you. He is not holding a dialogue with you from outside yourself. He is a living spring welling up within you that inspires, sustains, and encourages your prayer, your faith and your love.

This was well grasped by the little girl whose mother was arranging her white veil for her confirmation. “Mother,” she said, “I think I’ve already received him.” “Who did you receive, dear?” “The Holy Spirit.” “What makes you think so?” “I always feel like doing good things.”

The Spirit instructs us in the secret dwelling within us, in our innermost soul where he resides. He teaches not with words, but by infusing his knowledge into us. That is the way we must understand Christ’s promise: *“The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit...will instruct you in everything, and remind you of all that I told you”* (Jn 14:26).

The Holy Spirit teaches us to pray, not by proposing formulas of prayer to us, but by making prayer well up within us as a cry to God.

As our friend, the Holy Spirit consoles us, but not after the manner of earthly friends. His help comes from within. He is the energy that strengthens our will, and the fire that brings our heart to incandescence. “Kindle in our hearts the fire of your love.”

We can expect from the Holy Spirit nothing less than our complete interior renewal. The litany of petitions in the Sequence of Pentecost is remarkably expressive: *“Wash...rectify...heal...bend...warm...guide and redress...”* At the center of our being, he is truly the Spirit who creates and re-creates.

Why, then, are we so meagerly transformed by him? Because he has infinite respect for our freedom, and refuses to make a forced entry into our souls. He will not come to our help unless we cleave to him. The Holy Spirit is all-powerful only in the person who consents to be poor, attentive, docile, ductile, tractable, flexible and manageable. With such a person, he accomplishes great things. But we have to receive these very qualities as gifts from him: “Make me docile and then teach me, make me tractable and then lead me.”

The Apostles received the Holy Spirit only because, united in heart and mind, they persevered in prayer together with a few women including Mary, the Mother of Jesus (cf. Ac 1:14), in expectation of his coming. It is up to you to make each of your times of mental prayer a new Pentecost.