



The power of Pentecost

To my surprise, the Spirit was all around me—even on a work retreat.

BY ROBEN ITCHOAK

I PRAY FOR AN OUTPOURING of the Holy Spirit over you and your home. I pray that the Holy Spirit sweeps through every nook and cranny of your inner and outer life and kicks out all that Satan may attempt to plant in your life. I pray that the Holy Spirit fills your life with goodness. I pray that you are empowered with God's peace, love and grace. I pray that you use God's strength to live according to the "Fruit of the Spirit" (see Galatians 5:22-23), and that the light of Jesus in your eyes and the words God places in your heart come to bless everyone around you. With gratitude, in Jesus' name, I pray.

Over an arduous faith journey, during my darkest

moments, I have relied on the Holy Spirit. Most recently, after 33 years of continuously mothering minor children, I was feeling lost, disconnected and like I'd hit my "best-by" date. I have seven children, aged 33 to 7. I had no patience for my children's questions. I could not tolerate whining or indecisiveness. I tried to play games, do crafts, fix their favorite foods. I even started working with a counselor, but my children still complained or wanted more from me. I felt like I didn't want to be with them, but they needed me. All of this left me feeling like a horrible, selfish, inconsiderate mother. So I felt even worse.

A MOUNTAINTOP MOMENT

Then, amazingly, I participated in a rare, six-day, work-related summer retreat that offered skill-building and incorporated self-care. As support staff for the retreat, I was prepared to meet the needs of other people. But at the retreat, I felt like I was wearing a mask. I was happy to have this time with positive, motivated, hard-working adults. Yet I felt guilty for doing so well with them, and so poorly with my children.

One self-care activity was a daily 20-minute solo walk, without electronics, away from man-made structures, to connect with nature and the space we were in. During one of these



walks, we were given a task: to seek something in nature that reflected our true nature. That's when I realized my mask was on. As I walked and reflected, all the goodness was muted by my anger, disappointment and frustration. I wondered: *How can I be here when I am so conflicted?* Suddenly, I came to understand my real task was to, in the words of Psalms 46:10, "be still and know that I am God." I sat down. I closed my eyes. First, I felt the stillness, then a breeze, then my heart, filling with love and power. I confessed my fears, frustration, embarrassment over my anger, and inability to cope. As I prayed, I apologized. I asked for forgiveness and an outpouring

of the Holy Spirit.

POWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

The power in my heart felt like a burning inferno. It had to be the Holy Spirit. It was the same Holy Spirit that sends me a nagging feeling when I do or don't do something. The same Holy Spirit that provides me with power to keep doing what is right, even when I feel burned out, hopeless or tired.

That day, I asked God to make my work a blessing and to make me well for my family. To my surprise, a work retreat activity that was designed to connect people to a place, ended up connecting me more deeply with God and myself. As my mask faded, I was able to be my true self: grateful, hopeful, loving, kind, patient and creative.

At the end of the retreat, our group was warned that returning to our day-to-day routines might feel overwhelming, even shocking. We were encouraged to take a few moments each day to implement something we'd learned from the retreat. Little did I know I'd have to implement the learnings almost immediately.

RECONNECTING WITH GOD AND FAMILY

Before the retreat, I had arranged for the oldest of my children who still live at home to travel with me and take part in a separate retreat of their own, while I worked.

At the end of my retreat, I returned to my child who'd traveled with me. I felt so renewed, refreshed and hopeful! Within five minutes, the bliss disappeared. My child was upset and unhappy with me. As the feelings I'd had before the retreat resurfaced, I prayed.

I was so happy on top of the mountain, God! Why did things turn so bad so fast? Was my mask more deep-rooted than I knew?

After a while, I came to realize that all was well. I responded to my child, describing the mountain, what I learned and experienced, and what I wanted for our family. I talked about how the solo walks during my retreat helped. My child and I agreed that before we left, we would do solo walks along a beach.

As we went our separate ways, I saw an eagle in the distance. I wanted to sit and watch it, so I tried. I was so disappointed when someone else went near, causing it to fly away. The unsettling feelings I'd had at home, feelings of nothing being good enough, were returning. I wanted to resist them. I closed my eyes, kept still, and listened. As I did, I felt a warm gust of wind. God's Spirit again filled my heart with joy and acceptance.

By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, again I realized, all is well. I am enough. May it also be so for you.. 🙌