



A woman burns wood on the street to cook a meal for her husband and their daughter outside their home in São Paulo Sept. 16, 2022. (OSV News/Reuters/Amanda Perobelli)



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"Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the Earth!"

What kind of renewal are we anticipating? Do we really want the sort of renewal the Spirit might bring?

Popes Francis and Leo XIV have had a lot to say about our current need for renewal as individuals, church and societies. Francis used variations on the word *renew* at least 39 times in his [first apostolic exhortation](#), *Evangelii Gaudium*. In Paragraphs 2 and 3, he explained his purpose saying, "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ." This is what will form us as a missionary church, rooted in Christ and closeness to the poor in the kind of relationships that save people from "the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience."

Later, in Paragraph 208, Francis admitted that his warnings about the dangers of wealth might offend some. Expressing his genuine affection for everyone, he said that, rather than offend, "I am interested only in helping those who are in thrall to an individualistic, indifferent and self-centered mentality to be freed from those unworthy chains and to attain a way of living and thinking which is more humane, noble and fruitful, and which will bring dignity to their presence on this earth."

Pentecost Sunday

[May 24, 2026](#)

Acts 2:1-11

Psalms 104

1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

John 20:19-23

Scripturally, that sounds more prophetic than offensive.

Leo's [first apostolic exhortation](#), *Dilexi Te*, sharpened Francis' message. He said: "I am convinced that the preferential choice for the poor is a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society, if we can only set ourselves free of our

self-centeredness and open our ears to their cry."

Clearly, they are calling us to a renewal that comes primarily through a "preferential option for the poor." This renewal will be as earthshaking as the wind and fire that overwhelmed the disciples in the Pentecost event.

As Paul reminds the Corinthians in the chapter we hear excerpted today, the Spirit has created us as one body. Our sacramental life intensifies that reality: Through our worship, we choose to live as baptized Christians and we drink of the one Spirit who draws us together and into Christ.

The Gospel of John views the gift of the Spirit from a different angle than we hear in Acts. In John's narrative, Jesus' resurrection happened not on the third day, but on the "first," the day of the New Creation. This is the day when fear dissipates, door locks are futile. This is the day when Jesus breathes his Spirit into the disciples just as God breathed life into Adam.

What happens with the newly intense presence of the Spirit? Forgiveness.

Customarily, we understand "whose sins you forgive" and "those you retain" as the power to give or withhold divine forgiveness, but the original Greek is open to a significantly different interpretation. A literal translation of Jesus' words says: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If any of you 'let go' the sins of others, they are let go for them, if any you 'embrace' [hold, retain] they are embraced."

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Here "the divine passive," indicates that God is doing something without mentioning God's name. Thus, when disciples free people from sin, so does God. When disciples embrace or hold fast to someone, so does God. Put another way, urged by the power of the Spirit in them, disciples incarnate God's work of freeing and embracing people who feel bound or isolated for whatever reason.

After centuries of understanding words like forgive and retain in a juridical way, it might be time to think of them as words of empowerment and tenderness, an approach that sounds more like the Gospel message Jesus preached. (Remember, "I came that they may have life in abundance.")

Applying these readings to our times and places brings us right back to the question: What kind of renewal does the Spirit bring to the face of Earth? Our official church teaching offers an answer that will not be comfortable for all of us.

Today, the Spirit's renewal will lead more and more of us to realize that we are but one body in Christ. Therefore, our most urgent priority is inevitably to embrace the ailing and most vulnerable parts of our body: the malnourished, poor and marginalized, victims of local and international bullies — in sum, the poor, including those who are "in thrall" and chained to dehumanizing ways of thinking and acting.

Be careful about what you ask for. The kind of renewal the Spirit offers sends us on an earthshaking mission of solidarity to embrace and free our world from all that ails the body of Christ.

If we dare, let us ask the Spirit for the courage and generosity to genuinely pray, "Come! Renew the face of the Earth!"