

January 18, 2026

Second Sunday After the Epiphany

“Not Feeling It”

John 1:29-42a

Do you ever struggle with your need for the Holy Spirit? I believe most, if not all, Christians do. You may have days where you feel very attuned to God’s activity in your life, can feel His presence and blessings and all seems right spiritually. Then you encounter something of the world; someone really just nasty, or you get some marinara sauce blowback on your nice white outfit, or you just slip into that certain sin with which you struggle so much and it all comes crashing down. There seems to be nothing holy with your Spirit and you wonder if all the spiritual contentment was just your imagination.

Or maybe it’s that you feel like you’re in a spiritual desert. You believe in Christ crucified and risen, but every day is just a struggle not just in the world, but in your walk of faith; you seem to stink at it. Or maybe just the same old boring routine day after day and your faith seems, well, mundane. Or maybe you’ve just been hurt, and the pain just seems to override everything else and your prayers don’t make it all go away. Whatever, you just aren’t feeling it. You really want the Holy Spirit to come down and zap you into some passion, joy and zeal for the Lord.

Trust me, I know what it’s like. I think we all do. Yes, it’s true, we all know at least one of those folks who just seems to be on fire for Christ all the time and gushing the joy of salvation. But they have their darker moments. Scripture tells us even St. Paul and St. Peter had their struggles, so I know every Christian does.

But pause for a moment and look at Jesus through the eyes of John the Baptist: *“I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.”* Jesus, though fully God, is also fully human and the Holy Spirit descends and remains on Him. This is great news.

And, yes, I know you’re probably saying to yourself, “Yeah, but that’s Jesus. Of course He’s full of the Holy Spirit—He’s God!” Fair enough. But John the Baptist continues: *“I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. ’And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”*

We have to remember that this Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, has come to baptize with the Holy Spirit. He has come to give the Holy Spirit away. This is so, so obvious in the Gospels. Jesus, later in John’s Gospel, promises to send the Comforter—the Holy Spirit. Jesus breathes on His disciples and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” In Luke’s Gospel Jesus pretty much guarantees the Holy Spirit to those who pray for it. Later in the book of Acts we are informed that Peter, after receiving the Holy Spirit in power at Pentecost, preaches to the crowd and declares, *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”*

But we tend to look at Pentecost, the early church, the martyrs, and say, “But I want the Holy Spirit like them!” as if their faith was somehow superior to ours. It’s true that perhaps in some aspects their faith was superior, St. Paul exhorts believers to imitate his faith and I know of myself that there is certainly room for improvement. But we have received the same Holy Spirit as they did, unto our eternal salvation. It’s not like these folks never stumbled, never doubted, never had times when they just weren’t “feeling it”.

Our Epistle lesson is Paul's opening of his first letter to the Christians in Corinth. He describes them as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus," enriched in Jesus "in him in all speech and all knowledge" and "not lacking in any spiritual gift." These are believers who have actually received gifts of tongues, healing, prophecy and such. These are the folks to whom we look and desire the Holy Spirit like they received Him. Well, read the rest of the letter. They have received the Holy Spirit and are still a pretty messed up church. They are believers who struggle. They're still sinners, doubters, who continually are messing up their walk of faith. They have the Holy Spirit but obviously, some days, they aren't "feeling it".

You stand baptized. You have received the Holy Spirit. Jesus comes through on His promises and He said that "Everyone who believes and is baptized shall be saved." The very fact that you long to more powerfully receive the Holy Spirit testifies you possess this saving faith that can only be gifted you by that Spirit. St. Paul says clearly, "*No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit.*" Luther states it well in the Small Catechism: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." The Holy Spirit does this—in you!

This is most certainly true.

So what, then, do we do with this longing, this continual need we feel for a stronger and more powerful indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

We keep longing for it. We keep praying for it. We keep hearing God's Word that we might be strengthened by the Spirit working through the Word. We keep repenting of our sins and doubts and trusting in the Gospel of Christ's forgiveness. We remember our Holy Baptism into Christ and keep receiving His very body and blood into ourselves. We go to Christ, the man on whom the Spirit descended and remained and the God who bore the sins of humanity in order that His Spirit would be gifted to humanity.

We do not despair of that which we perceive we are lacking of this Holy Spirit. That would be really silly. I mean, in this life where we are still plagued by a fallen nature, afflictions, sufferings, and one day mortal death, do we really expect we're somehow required to have that perfect indwelling of the Spirit establishing faith that never doubts, always trusts, continually rejoices and is always "feeling it"?

Of course not. Here we long for that, knowing that it's coming, that Christ is bringing that for us when He returns and raises us from the dead! That perfect indwelling of the Holy Spirit comes when the perfection Christ gifts us in forgiveness is brought to completion on the Last Day.

So yes, pray earnestly for the Holy Spirit to strengthen you in your walk of faith, guide you to resist temptations to sin, and yes, to help you feel the joy of your salvation and the peace that passes all understanding. But never despair that the Spirit has left you. The very fact you pray to receive Him in incontrovertible evidence He has been given to you by Christ. If you know you lack, then you know you need. If you are going to Christ with that need, knowing the He and only He fills what you lack, then it is the Holy Spirit that has led you there.

God is faithful. Trust you stand saved by Christ, thus you are lacking no spiritual gift.

Amen.