

Maryknoll Missionary, Father William Cummings, is credited with coining the phrase “There are no atheists in foxholes” in a field sermon during the Battle of Bataan. Although there is some discussion as to who came up with the phrase. It was quoted by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1954 in remarks broadcast from the White House for an American Legion program.

The implications of the phrase, “there are no atheists in foxholes,” is to argue that in times of great fear or stress - as occurs in combat - everyone looks for a higher power for Divine assistance.

As might be expected, atheists who serve in the military have expressed their concern that this phrase questions their existence. And some have said it isn't so much of an argument against atheists as it is an argument against foxholes.

Nonetheless, it does seem that when the chips are down, most people who have a modicum of faith ... will recognize God, and hope in His power to save them ... and desire in some way His infinite mercy.

Today is Pentecost Sunday - hence the sea of red in the vestments, the flowers, and the decorations. Its name implies the “fiftieth day” and historically it is a Jewish feast celebrating the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai.

For Christians, Pentecost is the day when the disciples were in the upper room, nine days after Our Lord ascended to the right hand of God the Father ... and something happened.

After the Ascension, the Acts of the Apostles tells us that they “*devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.*”

And a few verses later, we are told that:

*suddenly there came from the sky
a noise like a strong driving wind,
and it filled the entire house in which they were.
Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire,
which parted and came to rest on each one of them.*

*And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit
and began to speak in different tongues,
as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.*

And the rest, I suppose, is history.

Yet what is our relationship to the Holy Spirit?

Blessed Pope John XXIII, who called the Second Vatican Council, on a sleepless night asked himself the question: “*Who's running the church, you or the Holy Spirit?*” And when he realized the answer was “*the Holy Spirit,*” he was able to sleep.

Do we find our own hearts and minds in conformity with Blessed Pope John XIII ... or do we approach the Holy Spirit as if we were atheists in foxholes?

Some authors have referred to the Holy Spirit as the “forgotten” member of the Most Holy Trinity.

Yet we are all Baptized ... and most of us are Confirmed. And so, we have at our disposal the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and reverence.

And these help us to live our lives in the Spirit ... bringing forth the fruits of the Holy Spirit:

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, modesty, self-control, [and] chastity.

I would propose a solution to the problem of “forgetting” the Holy Spirit ... to living our lives as if we were atheists - only looking for God’s power in extreme circumstances ... and that solution is ... to ask BIG.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us ask for a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us as individuals ... and upon our community ... and upon our leadership. Let us ask for a generous outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit ... and a super-abundance of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in our lives ... our community ... our Church ... and the world.

Let us give ourselves permission to ask for ... and to receive ... an overflowing portion of the Holy Spirit ... right now ... today ... and every day.