

Annie Dillard is a contemporary American author and artist. She grew up attending the Presbyterian Church, but converted to Catholicism in 1988. One of her works is a narrative essay entitled *An Expedition to the Pole*. It's about what she calls the "Pole of Relative Inaccessibility," which she defines as "that imaginary point on the Arctic Ocean farthest from land in any direction." There's one on the Antarctic too. She says there also one in metaphysics; it's called the "Absolute." She writes: "One of the things we know about the Absolute is that it is relatively inaccessible. It is that point of spirit farthest from every accessible point of spirit in all directions. Like the others, it is a Pole of the Most Trouble. It is also the Pole of great price." Dillard's essay is a comparison between "the land" and "the people," "**the land**" referring to expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctic, in search of the Pole (of Relative Inaccessibility,) and all the struggles, challenges, dangers, and difficulties encountered by such explorers as Sir John Franklin, Sir Robert Falcon Scott, Robert E. Perry, Henry Hudson; "**the people**" referring to the Catholic Church she attends, and their search for the Spirit, for the divine in their lives, for the Absolute, a Pole of Relative Inaccessibility.

Toward the end of the essay, she has a particularly interesting paragraph, which is very appropriate for today's feast: "On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a

batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return."

Today – on this feast of Pentecost – we invoke the Spirit: we call down the Spirit upon us. Dillard asks: Do we have any idea what sort of power we are invoking?

Look at what the power of the Spirit can do (today's first reading): take people from every nation under heaven – Parthians, Medes, Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Rome, Cretans and Arabs: the Spirit takes all these people and gives them a common understanding of the good news that was being proclaimed. That's the power of the Spirit!

Do we believe that the Spirit has the same power today? Would it be possible that the same Spirit could take all the people of the world today – the Jews and the Arabs and the Moslems and the Christians, people from Pakistan and Afganistan, from India and China, from the US and Mexico, from Syria and Lebanon, and give them a common understanding? Or is Dillard right when she says that we don't believe a word of it – when we speak of the power of the Spirit?

Look at what the power of the Spirit did to Paul: took a dedicated, devoted Jew, lead persecutor of Christians, and made him the foremost disciple of Christ – the apostle to the Gentiles all over the known world.

Look at what the power of the Spirit did to Damien in a leper colony on Molakai, to Mother Teresa in the slums of Calcutta, to Thomas Merton in the Village, to Oscar Romero in the cathedral in San Salvador, to a reformed alcoholic priest in the debris of 9/11. And there have been thousands of other over the centuries.

This is the Spirit we invoke today – a Spirit that has such power that anything – literally anything – can happen! For 50 days Jesus has been preparing us for this Spirit; are we one with the Spirit? Are we ready to be drawn out to where we can never return? What's our response to Dillard's question: Do we "have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, . . . does no one believe a word of it?"