

Ubi Spiritus

The Holy Spirit is the Freedom of God. God's nature is not based on rules; it is based on Love. Rather, the only rule God follows is Love. God can afford to disregard rules the same way a jazz artist can afford to disregard standard musical norms ... and still sound good. God doesn't disobey rules like a teenager rebels against authority. He transcends such juvenile behavior because His version of freedom is based on virtue, not rebellion.

On Pentecost Sunday, when the Spirit of God burst into the world's stage, He brought with Him His new version of freedom. He wanted us—God's children—to become partakers of His Glorious Freedom (Ref. 2 Pet 1:4 and Rom 8:19–21). He really and truly wanted (and still wants) us to be really and truly free. Where the Spirit of God is, there is Genuine Freedom. *Ubi Spiritus, Ibi Libertas.*

Genuine Freedom is not the power to do whatever one feels like—a better name for that would be randomness or licentiousness. There is an “anything goes” version of freedom that is very popular in the contemporary world and that many of us have absorbed courtesy of being children of our age. Authentic freedom does not come from this kind of untamed passion or untrained potential; it springs precisely from cultivating this raw potential—it comes from *diligent* practice. In a word, it comes from Love. Genuine Freedom is *virtue unleashed*, not *passion running amok*. When the truth of things is internalized *in our bones*, i.e. when a strong character emerges thanks to consistent practice – then and only then can we be trusted to “do whatever we want” because whatever we will want, will almost always be good. Below are a few relatable examples of mature freedom in action:

1. An intern, freshly recruited into the world of work: Since rookies haven't taken the time and trouble to internalize the reality of their trade, they generally have very limited capacity for action. Only seasoned professionals are really free from the burden of trial and error that accompanies the typical beginner. This “real capacity for action” is precisely what we mean by genuine freedom—it is that actualized energy that gives our raw potential weight, breadth and depth.
2. A sports player who has put in the hours: Only a football player who has practiced for hours on end has the freedom—the properly channeled internal energy—to shoot the ball exactly where he wants, e.g. at the top corner or on the crossbar, even whilst under pressure to perform.
3. Musicians who have dedicated time to practice their scales or pieces or who have taken time to internalize their music theory: Such persons can

be left free to play whatever they want because they can almost always “spontaneously” play the right music at the right time to create the right mood.

The people of our time, especially those of a more artistic leaning—in their spirit which is eternally open to take in more light—are yearning mightily for the revelation of *The Spirit*; whether they are aware of it or not. In their most acute moments of artistic in-spirit-ation (sic), they are drawing in *His* breath. In their highest raptures of artistic exaltation, they are—despite themselves—crying out, *Veni Sancte Spiritus!* Behind the restlessness of every poet, musician, painter and sculptor, there dwells an insatiable longing for some higher ideal, for a light which is *The Light*: This is how the Holy Spirit works in and with the soul of every artist. Every human artist is a close ally of the Divine Spirit—whether they explicitly believe in God or not. In every genuine work of art in fact, the artist is continuing, in and with The Spirit, the Work of The Creator (The Father) and of the Redeemer (The Son). Art is co-creation, co-redemption, co-sanctification.

Creation is still happening as we speak. Every morning when the sun rises, a continuation of the Creator’s, “let there be light” takes place. Every time a seed germinates, The Creator’s “Let the earth bring forth plants of all kinds” is reenacted. Whenever a baby is conceived in its mother’s womb, God’s, “Let us make man in our own image and likeness” is repeated. Every artist is intuitively aware of this process. All artists are participants of this Great Story.

Artists can only ever play with God’s *clay*. All they ever do is tweak His creation. They lack the kind of omnipotence it takes to make things *ex nihilo*, i.e. out of nothing. Creation—at least as expounded by St. Thomas Aquinas (*S. Th. III, Q3. A3*)—is not mere change or transformation of stuff. In normal human changes, there is “a something” before and “a new something” after. In Creation *ex nihilo* however, there wasn’t anything *whatsoever* before the change, and there is “a completely new something” after the change. A new being comes “to be”.

The “clay” a sculptor plays with can be marble, wood, metal, soapstone The “clay” of the painter is pigment—oil or water, acrylic...—on canvas. The dancer’s “clay” is the human body—with all its revelatory movements. The musician’s “clay” is sound, with all its melodic, harmonic and rhythmic potencies. *Clay* here is a metaphor for “the medium an artist chooses to play or express himself with” or the “artistic language he chooses to speak with”.

On Pentecost, The Spirit made His presence felt as raging wind and fiery tongues. His mission—to continue and complete The Work of The Father and

The Work of Son. His medium—the clay of each person’s free will. His paintbrush—The “Finger” (Ref: Ex. 8:19 & Luke 11:20) which he dips into the palette of each person’s rich psycho-somatic-spiritual make-up, in order to produce that unique masterpiece.

St. Hildegard of Bingen, a remarkable female figure in tumultuous twelfth-century Germany, had a very rich and fruitful relationship with the Holy Spirit. Her work as an abbess, visionary, prophet, herbalist, and composer had a great impact on her time. Born in 1098 in southwest Germany, Hildegard entered a Benedictine convent as a young girl and eventually became the abbess at the age of thirty-eight. She had many visions which she not only wrote down but beautifully illustrated with her artwork. She wrote a number of books based on her visions and her understanding of God, the cosmos, salvation and judgment. Hildegard wrote more than seventy-seven songs, as well as a musical drama entitled *Ordo Virtutum* (The Order of the Virtues). She composed beautiful original liturgical music, which has in the last couple of decades been discovered and performed to award winning success. Despite her evident strengths and prolific achievements in so many fields, Hildegard sums up her own view of herself in a beautiful and now famous self-description:

Thus am I, a feather on the breath of God¹

The song in which Hildegard praises the “greenness of God’s finger,” *O Viriditas Digi*ti Dei, reflects a theme which pervades her writings, music and paintings. It is summed up in a Latin word—probably coined by Hildegard herself—*Viriditas*: usually translated as “greenness” or “greening”. For Hildegard, *viriditas* referred to the principle of vitality that is at work in all of creation. God breathed *viriditas* into Adam and Eve at their creation. *Viriditas* fills the season of spring and “causes the grasses to laugh with the joy of life”. Yet *viriditas* is equally the Spirit of God at work in us bringing spiritual life and renewal. “Greening” was her way of speaking about the creativity and fruitfulness of a human being fully alive and in harmony with the purposes of God.

In the spirit of renewing creation and speaking in tongues, maybe its high time we looked for a new term to describe the Glorious kind of Freedom the Spirit of God brought us on Pentecost. Freedom understood as power, energy, action, virtue, grace, creativity, ongoing renewal, greenness, freshness, life, fruitfulness ... I don’t know about you but for me, Hildegard’s *Viriditas* seems to be a worthy contender for such a rich and complex reality. It contains all those nuances we have been trying to bring out. It helps us understand, *The Gift* that is *The Spirit*

¹ The internet has copious information on all aspects of Hildegard’s life and achievements. See for example <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/med/hildegarde.php>. Next time you have a chance, try googling “Hildegard of Bingen’s Symphonia” to listen to some of her hauntingly beautiful melodies.

and His *modus operandi* in our lives. *Ubi Spiritus, Ibi Viriditas!* Where the Spirit of God is, there is evergreen-grace-filled-creative-fruitfulness!

If only each of us would allow The Spirit's "*Green Finger*" to touch our dry hearts —to mould and cultivate them according to His wishes! How beautiful creation would become once again! It is *The Spirit* and only *He* that can give life and make things grow—the flesh is of no avail (Ref. 1 Cor 3:6-7 & Jn 6:63). Just as life and greenness creep back into the bush after devastating fires, so strength, health and creativity are quietly renewed in a human being burned out by busyness or distress. The Holy Spirit is the *nurture* that *greens* our dry *nature*. If only we knew how much *He* longs, yearns, pines, aches ... to restore each of us into the image of the Only Begotten of the Father? If only we could grant Him the joy of adding colour and variety into our gray and dull existence ... how much the face of the earth would change and how gloriously *our faces* would shine.

Veni Sancte Spiritus! Come Holy Spirit! Fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your Love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be (re)created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen