

Luke wrote in *Acts of the Apostles* how, at our Lord's bodily Ascension into the transcendent Trinity, his Apostles heard two pledges: one made by Jesus (that God's *hagios Pneuma* "holy Breath" would empower them), the other made by angels (that Jesus himself would come back as he had gone, in a cloud).

Back in their upstairs room in Jerusalem the Apostles were, "with Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers [...] constantly at prayer." These first few Christians prayed from Friday (the day after Christ's Ascension) until the Saturday before the harvest festival known as Pentecost (meaning "Fiftieth [day after Passover]"). Those nine days, Friday to Saturday, may have struck Luke as echoing the Greco-Roman nine-day ritual mourning of a lost loved one. The Latin for "of nine" is *novenarius*, hence a nine-day "novena" of prayer.

Luke wrote that Christ's pledge of *hagios Pneuma* was fulfilled on that Fiftieth day with the new Pentecostal harvest, the seed (Jesus' body) having been buried at Passover (our Good Friday). The new and quickening harvest was of that same holy Breath (in Latin, *sancte Spiritus* "holy Spirit"), stored within and shared out through the Apostles. The angelic pledge of Jesus' return, we pray for still.

Novenas of prayerful preparation began in early medieval France and Spain before the Christmas feast,

referencing Jesus' nine "preparatory" months in the womb before his first newborn ministry to the shepherds. By 1000 in the Low Countries novenas of preparation were also kept ahead of Marian and other saints' feasts. From the 1600s such prayers became widespread among Roman Catholics, not least at times of peril or need, or as a current devotion.

Other Churches took up the novena form through the 1900s, not least at Ascensiontide. The Church of England's *Common Worship* (2000) declared a novena thus: "The nine days after Ascension Day until Pentecost are days of prayer and preparation to celebrate the outpouring of the Spirit."

The novena here is based upon the Latin hymn *Veni Sancte Spiritus* that was likely written by Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury (1207-1228). Known also as the *Golden Sequence*, it was translated by Church of England priest John Mason Neale (1818-66) in a version still found (with later editors' revisions and reproduced here) in *The New English Hymnal* (1986) numbers 139 and 520. The "sevenfold mystery", for which the last prayer begs, is the Spirit's Seven Gifts, hidden from unbelievers but listed in Hebrew at *Isaiah* 11:2 as **wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge and godly fear**, the seventh gift of *eusebeia* or *pietas* "piety" being found in the Greek and Latin Bibles.

Ascensiontide Novena

*Veni, Sancte Spiritus,
et emitte caelitus
lucis tuae radium.*

*Veni, pater pauperum,
veni, dator munerum,
veni, lumen cordium.*

*Consolator optime,
dulcis hospes animae,
dulce refrigerium.*

*In labore requies,
in aestu temperies,
in fletu solatium.*

*O lux beatissima,
reple cordis intima
tuorum fidelium.*

*Sine tuo numine,
nihil est in homine,
nihil est innoxium.*

*Lava quod est sordidum,
riga quod est aridum,
sana quod est saucium.*

*Flecte quod est rigidum,
fove quod est frigidum,
rege quod est devium.*

*Da tuis fidelibus,
in te confidentibus,
sacrum septenarium.*

*Da virtutis meritum,
da salutis exitum,
da perenne gaudium.*

Come, thou holy Spirit, come,
and, from thy celestial home,
shed thy light and brilliancy.

Father of the poor, draw near.
Giver of all gifts, be here.
Come, the soul's true radiancy.

Come, of comforters the best,
of the soul the sweetest guest.
Come, in toil, refreshingly.

Thou, in labour, rest most sweet,
thou art shadow from the heat,
comfort in adversity.

O thou Light, most pure and blest,
shine within the inmost breast
of thy faithful company.

Where thou art not, man has naught
Every holy deed and thought
comes from thy divinity.

Sinful hearts do thou make whole.
Bring to life the arid soul.
Guide the feet that go astray.

Make the stubborn heart unbend.
To the faint, new hope extend.
Wounded souls, their hurt allay.

Fill the faithful (who confide
in thy power to guard and guide),
with thy sevenfold mystery.

Here thy grace and virtue send.
Grant salvation at the end
and, in heaven, felicity.

Ascensiontide Novena

One: Friday 19 May

Come, thou holy Spirit, come,
and, from thy celestial home,
shed thy light and brilliancy.

O God, by the light of whose
holy Spirit we are taught to trust
you amid the darkness of others'
broken pledges, our own fears
and lonesomeness; let it be that,
in that same Breath, I may be
always truly wise and ever glad
in the Giver of Life's blessings;
I ask in the name of him who
seeks after all the lost. **Amen.**

Two: Saturday 20 May

Father of the poor, draw near.
Giver of all gifts, be here.
Come, the soul's true radiancy.

Father of we who know our
worldly might and wealth is
nothing worth; shine into my
soul such light as I may beam
back into the souls of others;
and draw near, I beg you, at my
every daily task, and help me
hoard your Spirit-borne gifts
where neither thief breaks in
nor moth-grub gnaws, that
I may be glad of them, together
with you, forever. **Truth.**

Three: Seventh Sunday of Easter: Sunday after Ascension Thursday

Come, of comforters the best,
of the soul the sweetest guest.
Come, in toil, refreshingly.

O unseen Bliss, foremost bringer
of every blessing, we are open
to you even as we spin and
worry; in the almighty name
of Jesus Ascended, whose bitter
death has bought me back from
sin and the grave, let me host
you who sweetens my days and
cools the heat of my every hurt.
So be it.

Four: Monday 22 May

Thou, in labour, rest most sweet,
thou art shadow from the heat,
comfort in adversity.

O God, great Threefold-one,
who breathed your sweet
Breath through the Apostles and
into the ongoing work of the
Church; answer my prayers with
your strong arm so that our
struggles for your sake may be
as rest from sin and as waking
anew from sleep; I ask through
Christ, my Lord. **Amen.**

Five: Tuesday 23 May

O thou Light, most pure and blest,
shine within the inmost breast
of thy faithful company.

O Paraclete, who speaks brightly
within us against the foe;
enlighten our minds, I beseech
you; and, at your banquet both
here and beyond, may we feed
by trust with thanksgiving. **Truth.**

Six: Wednesday 24 May

Where thou art not, man has
naught.
Every holy deed and thought
comes from thy divinity.

Great Threefold-one, breathe
into me the holy Breath in all his
might, and make of my nothing
one who thinks and does your
will, sharing in Christ's pledge of
old; who lives and reigns, world
without end. **So be it.**

Seven: Thursday 25 May

Sinful hearts do thou make whole.
Bring to life the arid soul.
Guide the feet that go astray.

Lead us, heavenly Spirit, out of
our dry-as-dust mistrust, and
pour down righteousness upon
this droughty heart, that the
Gospel seed might grow in my
heart, ripening for all who pass
by; in Jesus' holy name. **Amen.**

Eight: Friday 26 May

Make the stubborn heart unbend.
To the faint, new hope extend.
Wounded souls, their hurt allay.

Lord Jesus, by whose wounds
we are healed, breathe the hope
of Paradise to us as to the dying
thief who acknowledged you,
that we may walk with you and
him in Eden's garden. **Truth.**

Nine: Saturday 27 May

Fill the faithful (who confide
in thy power to guard and guide),
with thy sevenfold mystery.
Here thy grace and virtue send.
Grant salvation at the end
and, in heaven, felicity.

O holy Spirit, so long without
food, we forget our hunger, our
souls wither, skin and bone we
feel it not; but fill us with your
wisdom,
understanding,
counsel,
fortitude,
knowledge,
godly fear
and piety.
Hear my plea, who am baptized
in you, that I may prize your gifts
today and at Pentecost, even
unto my last breath, and happily
in heaven forever. **So be it.**