

DISCIPLES IN MISSION TURN TO THE SPIRIT



DURING THE EASTER VIGIL, THOSE WHO ARE ENTERING THE CHURCH WILL RECEIVE THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION: BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION, AND EUCHARIST. EACH ONE OF THESE CONNECTS US TO JESUS CHRIST AND TO CHRIST'S HOLY SPIRIT. WITHOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT, THERE CAN BE NO CATHOLIC FAITH EXPERIENCE.

The Holy Spirit

Most Roman Catholic churches have a cross or a crucifix as the central image in the sanctuary. It is very startling, then, to visit St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. There, behind the main altar, in the very front of the basilica, is a dramatic representation of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove.

The dove is formed with marble so thin that it lets light through. As the sun glows behind it, it seems to fill the whole building. It creates the powerful image of the Holy Spirit taking over the whole sanctuary and the whole assembly. It's as if the Spirit's power engulfs everything.

This centuries-old image shows the place of the Spirit in Catholic life today. The Spirit is God's power communicated to us by Jesus. Only in the Spirit can we follow Jesus.

Evangelizing Power

"Evangelization will never be possible without...the Holy Spirit," wrote Pope Paul VI (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, n. 75). Indeed, no Christian life is possible

without the Spirit, because life in Christ is precisely life in the power of the Spirit. But evangelization needs the Holy Spirit in a particular way, because evangelization calls on those gifts that the Spirit brings to us: witness, wisdom, proclamation, sharing, compassion, and love.

"The mission of the church, like that of Jesus, is God's work, or, as Luke often puts it, the work of the Spirit," wrote Pope John Paul II (*Mission of the Redeemer*, n. 25). In other words, the Holy Spirit opens us up to mission. Before the Spirit came, were not the apostles huddled in fear? After the Spirit came upon them, they proclaimed with such power that people of all languages and cultures were able to hear the Gospel.

With the coming of the Spirit comes mission. And with the advent of mission comes the ability to reach beyond ourselves to others, in faith.

Bestowing the Spirit on his disciples, Jesus says that the Spirit will enable them to *understand* his message and grow in it (John 14:26). In other words, following Jesus means living in him, taking his word as the word of our lives, and having the confidence to voice that word to others.

The *confidence* to speak God's word arises from the power of the Spirit. For the Spirit works in us even when we are not sure how to say things, voicing our prayers, our needs, and our faith. The Spirit is with us in our weakness and fears, helping us transcend our limitations (Romans 8:22-27).

And the context for proclaiming God's word—*love*—is also a gift of the Holy Spirit. Our centuries of reflection on the Trinity have taught us that the Spirit is the very love between Father and Son. When Jesus gives us his Spirit, he joins us to this divine love itself. "This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit," St. John tells us (1 John 4:13). This love shows itself in such a variety of ways that it brings about a whole abundance of gifts, without which God's word cannot be shared. Paul tells us many of the Spirit's gifts: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Aren't these precisely the gifts we need to spread Christ's message to others?

The bishops tell us in *Go and Make Disciples*: "The Holy Spirit is the fire of Jesus. The Spirit, the first gift of the risen Christ to his people, gives us both the ability to receive the Gospel of Jesus and, in response, the power to proclaim it.

Without the Holy Spirit, evangelization simply cannot occur. The Spirit brings about evangelization in the life of the Church and in the Church's sharing the Gospel with others" (p. 5).

The more attentive we can be to the Spirit, as individuals and as parish communities, the more deeply both the impulse and the skills for evangelization will be implanted in us.

Mary

Has anyone evangelized more completely than Mary, the mother of Jesus? She brought forth God's Word in the flesh. But she herself was a work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit prepared her to be Christ's mother. The Spirit came upon her and she conceived Jesus, and the Spirit came upon her again after Jesus rose from the dead, as she stood in the midst of the apostles.

Mary, as a disciple, is a model for all of us. Her discipleship, rooted in the experience of the Spirit, guides us in our openness to the Spirit today.

"Come, Holy Spirit," we pray—with Mary, the apostles, the saints, the Church and, indeed, all creation.

Reflection

Read and reflect on Romans 8:12-27.

Prayer

O HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD, BRING TO BIRTH WITHIN ME THE GRACE TO BE A TRUE DISCIPLE OF JESUS. BRING FORTH FROM MY LIFE THE GIFTS THAT WILL ALLOW ME TO BE CHRIST'S SERVANT TO OTHERS. SPIRIT OF GOD, CONTINUE TO POUR INTO YOUR CHURCH YOUR POWER AND LIFE, BRING FORTH FROM HER, AGAIN AND AGAIN, THE VIRTUES AND BLESSINGS THROUGH WHICH SHE, AS CHRIST'S BODY IN THE WORLD, WILL BRING SALVATION. SPIRIT OF GOD, BREATHE THE KINGDOM INSIDE OF US AND BRING US ALL TO CHRIST'S KINGDOM. IN YOUR POWER AND IN ACCORD WITH THE WILL OF GOD OUR FATHER. AMEN.

Action

Try to identify how the Spirit is revealed in your life and in the world around you. List concrete examples.