

6. The Holy Spirit

Jesus told his Apostles on several occasions that he was leaving them in order to send to them a mysterious Person to help and teach them. He called him the "Spirit of Truth" and the "Counsellor".

On the day he ascended into heaven he told them to wait in Jerusalem for the fulfillment of this promise. The great event took place ten days later, on the Jewish festival called Pentecost. It is thus reported in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

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Pentecost

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2, 1-4).

The mighty wing blowing round the house and the tongues as of fire were signs of the Spirit of God, powerful and ardent, bringing strength and blessing to the whole of Creation and particularly to the Church of Christ.

A sudden change came over the Apostles. They who had fled and been full of doubts and fears when Christ was arrested now became strong and bold as lions. They were now ready and eager to preach the gospel, to proclaim the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The city at that time was full of people come from many countries for the religious celebrations. Attracted by "the sound of a mighty wind" they began to gather around the Apostles. They were amazed to hear the Apostles speaking the languages of the various nationalities present.

St. Peter, with the eleven other Apostles at his side, then preached powerfully, declaring that Jesus was the Saviour of the world promised by the prophets of old. The affects of this preaching were astonishing. After St. Peter's great sermon many came to him eagerly and asked: "What shall we do?" He replied: "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ." Three thousand were baptized that day. The Acts of the Apostles tells how day by day the numbers of the Christians grew.

This amazing success was due to the fact that the Spirit promised by Christ had come down upon his followers to remain with them always. He is a mystery far beyond the grasp of the human mind, but the Bible tells us much about him. He is the divine breath which gives life to the world and wisdom to the minds of men.

The Breath of Life

"Spirit" is from a Latin word meaning air in motion, such as breath or the wind. Both of these naturally suggest life. If a man breathes it is a sure sign that he is alive, and when he dies he is said to "breathe his last." The death of Christ on the cross is thus described in the Gospel: "then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last" (Luke 23, 46).

Men thought of the wind blowing across the wide expanse of the earth, drying out and warming the soil so that life springs from it, as the life-giving breath of God. Hence when they thought of God as the giver of life, the sacred writers often called him "The Spirit."

The first words of the Bible tell how the Spirit of God brought design and life into the universe, brought order out of chaos and developed plant and animal life.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light;' and there was light" (Gen. 1, 1-3).

When the time was ripe God made man through a special action of the Spirit. Man received a unique gift of the breath of life.

"Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen. 2,7).

The Spirit who gave life to all creatures in the beginning continues to support that life. If he abandons them, they cease to breathe.

In psalm 104 the psalmist speaks thus to God of his creatures:

**"When thou hidest thy face they are dismayed;
When thou takest away their breath, they die and
return to their dust.
When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are
created;
And thou renewest the face of the ground"**

(Ps. 104, 29-30).

Spirit then is God the giver of life.

The Breath of Wisdom

The sacred writers teach that the Spirit gives skill to the hand, courage to the heart and wisdom to the mind of men, particularly those chosen by God to be the leaders of the people. The skilled craftsmen who designed and made the beautiful things used in worship in the Holy Place received their skill from the Spirit. He gave wisdom to kings such as David, under whose lead many sacred songs were written, and to Solomon, who built the first great temple in Jerusalem.

Above all, the Spirit enlightened the minds of the prophets and sacred writers so that they declared God's message to the people. The prophets were confident that they spoke with the authority of God and were moved and directed by his Spirit. Frequently they used words like those of the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted" (Is. 61, 1).

They declared, however, that there was to come a Saviour who would be completely *filled* with the Spirit of God. The eleventh chapter of Isaiah says:

**"The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord"(Is. 11, 2).**

In the time of the Saviour not only prophets but all types of men, young and old, would speak under the influence of the Spirit. St. Peter in his first sermon quoted the words of the second chapter of the Prophet Joel:

**"And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
Even upon the menservants and maidservants
In those days, I will pour out my spirit" (Joel 2, 28-29).**

The Spirit then is God, the giver of wisdom, the teacher of truth.

The Breath of Divine Life

God gives natural life to plants, animals and man. But he also gives to man a life above Nature, that *supernatural*. It is, in fact, a sharing in the life of God. Jesus came precisely to give this life. He said: "I came that they may have life, and have

it abundantly" (John 10, 10). He fed the hungry, cured the sick and raised the dead. But he did more. He died, rose from the dead and went to heaven to send his Spirit into men that they might live the life of God.

The first two chapters of St. Luke's Gospel tell how the Spirit of God acted strongly upon all who came in contact with Christ. The angel said to Mary, when she conceived Christ in her womb: "The Holy Spirit will overshadow you." When Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, Elizabeth was "filled with the Holy Spirit" as soon as she heard the voice of Mary, and the unborn child, later to be called John the Baptist, stirred in the womb. The old priest Zechariah, her husband, and Simeon, the prophet who waited daily in the Temple for the coming of the Saviour were also filled with the Spirit and praised God.

Above all, Christ himself was filled with the Spirit. He was led by him into the desert to spend forty days praying and fasting, in preparation for his public preaching. He returned "in the power of the Spirit." In the first words of his first sermon, as given in St. Luke's Gospel, he applied to himself the words of the prophet Isaiah, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Luke 4, 14-18).

Baptism of the Spirit

The Spirit gives divine life at Baptism. John the Baptist the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, was the great prophet sent to prepare the way for the coming of Christ. The third chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel tells how he urged the people to repent of their sins to prepare to receive the message of the Saviour. He told them to be baptized, as a sign of sorrow and desire to be cleansed from sin. He promised that the Saviour would give a new and more powerful form of Baptism. He said: **"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire"** (Matt. 3, 11).

Jesus himself came to the river Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist. He had no need of this, for he was the sinless Son of God. But he had entered fully into the condition of human nature and became like all men (4th Eucharistic Prayer). Therefore he underwent the ceremony which was a sign of repentance. John saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove come down and alight upon him.

Jesus gave a new kind of Baptism, which not only was a sign of sorrow and cleansing from sin, but also gave new life. The third chapter of St. John's gospel tells how Nicodemus, a pious leader of the Jews, came to question Jesus about his teaching. Jesus told him that those who would belong to his Church must be "born anew." Nicodemus asked how a man could be born a second time. Jesus explained that he was talking about birth to a supernatural life, a sharing in the life of God. This would be given through a baptism not merely with water, like the

baptism given by John, but with water and the Holy Spirit. He said: "truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3, 3-5).

The Spirit then is God giving "new life."

Sons of God

All men are sons of God, since he made them and they depend upon him for life. But Christians become sons of God in a fuller and deeper sense. They are lifted up by the Spirit to share the life of the risen Jesus, so that like Jesus they can call God "Abba," which is the Hebrew for "father." In the fourth chapter of the letter to the Galatians, St. Paul says:

"And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father! So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir" (Gal. 4, 6-7).

Christians are brothers of Jesus and sons of God. As the heir shares in the riches of his father, so the Christian shares in the riches of God's life for ever.

The Spirit does not come to the followers of Christ only on special occasions, as was the case with the kings, prophets and writers of old. He comes to *dwell* in them. Each Christian is like a church or temple in which God lives. In the third chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians St. Paul asks "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3, 16). The only way we can deprive ourselves of this divine indwelling is by serious sin.

The Breath of Divine Wisdom

The fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of St. John's Gospel give the final message of Christ to his Apostles before he died. He promised that although he was going away, he would not leave them to discover by themselves the meaning of his teaching. He would send his Spirit to remain always with them and guide them into all truth. He said: "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth" (John 14,16).

A counselor, called *Paraclete* in Greek, is one who takes the part of or defends another, as does a friend in time of need or a barrister in a court of law. Christ was the counselor and friend of his disciples while he was with them on earth, but after his departure he would send "another" to protect, befriend and enlighten them so that they would remember and teach correctly what he had taught. He said:

“These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14, 25-26).

The Apostles, and the men they ordained to help them in teaching the Gospel, were absolutely convinced that they spoke and acted under the driving force and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Reading the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, one feels the enthusiasm and excitement of those first years when thousands were converted. The Holy Spirit acted so strongly upon them that he seemed to have been “poured out,” as was foretold by the prophet Joel.

The Spirit then is God giving wisdom to Christians in the Church of Christ.

In short, the Spirit is God’s life, his energy, his power his vigour for action, his wisdom, his fire of emotion, his tender and strong love. He acts in the men in whom he dwells, making them live the life of God more fully. He acts upon their intellects, so that they know the truth of Christ better and make sound judgments. He acts on their wills, so that they are strong in the resolve to do good. He acts on their hearts and emotions, so that they love generously and bravely.

The Blessed Trinity

The third chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel records:

“And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” (Matt. 3, 16-17).

The three Persons in one God are represented there, the Blessed Trinity. God the Father is represented by the voice from heaven. Jesus Christ coming up from the water is God the Son. God the Holy Spirit is represented by the dove.

There is only one God, but he manifests himself in three kinds of activity. He is the *Creator* of all, and takes care of all his creatures more tenderly than a human father cares for his children.

He is the *Saviour* of all. He became man to save fallen mankind and lift them up to live his own life.

He is the *Sanctifier*, that is, he makes men holy by filling them with the life of God.

There are three **Persons** in God. Yet there is only one God, one divine **Nature**. We cannot fully understand this. We can but state the teaching of Sacred Scripture as unfolded for us by the Church.

There are three Persons in one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father is distinct from the Person of the Son; the Person of the Holy Spirit is distinct from both.

Each of these Persons is infinite, that is, has no limitation. None of them was created. None of them existed before the others. All are eternal, equal in glory and power.

The Son proceeds from the Father, and yet does not come after him. He is the perfect image of him. He is the mental Word with which the Father expresses in his mind his own perfections. Hence in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel he is called "the Word."

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son, yet does not come after them. He is the expression of the love which they have for each other. He is like the sigh or breath ("Spiritus") of God's love.

One God

The three persons are one God, creating all things and keeping them in existence, saving men from the effects of sin, giving them divine life and lifting them up to live with him.

The whole life of the Catholic Church is centred on the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. All her worship is directed to God the Father, through Our Lord Jesus Christ, his Son, who lives and reigns with him in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

The whole purpose of the life of Christ was to die and rise from the dead, to send his Holy Spirit to lift men up with himself that they might live with the Father for ever. He sent his Apostles into the whole world with this command:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28, 19).

Innermost Secret

The doctrine of the Trinity is the inner, the innermost, life of God, his profoundest secret. In the strictest sense it is his business, not ours. He did not have to reveal it to us—yet he did. Why? Because he loves men and so wants not only to be served by them, but truly known by them. It is the surest mark of love to want to

be known by the one loved. That is why God has told us the secret of his innermost life, because he loves us and reaches out for our love. His revelation of the trinity to us is, in one sense, as much a proof of his love for us as Calvary.

This is explained to Catholic children, while still at school, in the following words:

“The mystery of the Blessed Trinity is altogether beyond our grasp, because the infinite God cannot be fully understood by our limited minds. . . . However, it gives us real knowledge; we know something of the marvel of God’s inner life, of the perfect happiness of the Three Persons and Their life together. We think humbly and lovingly that God the Father, too, that God the Son for us ‘dispossessed Himself, and took the nature of a slave’ (Phil. 2, 7), to make us sons with Him, that God the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in us at baptism. So we are grateful to God for what He has told us about Himself, and our life with Him.” (Extract from Australian Catholic Catechism, book 2, ch. 38.)

Adopted Sons

God makes these inner secrets of his own life known to us in order to unite us more closely with himself. He reveals to us the infinite knowledge and infinite love which exists within the Blessed Trinity. He helps us to appreciate what it means to be united with him and to share in his life.

He makes us more aware of the fatherhood of God. God is a Father in a most wonderful sense. Away back in eternity. Before time began, God begets a Son to whom he communicates his own divine life. God revealed this to us even before the birth of Christ. “You are my Son, today I have begotten you” (psalm 2:7). All life exists in God who is its source. The Father communicates this divine life to the Son. This Son, who is equal to the Father in all things. Is “the only Son of God”. The Father and the Son are united in a perfect and mutual love. From this love proceeds that Third Person whom God himself calls the Holy Spirit. That, in so far as any human mind can grasp, is the secret of the life of God within himself.

And now, that same God extends his paternity, his fatherhood, in order to enrich other beings outside of himself. He calls human beings to share this divine life of love by making them his children by adoption. In this way the God who by nature has only one Son, will now by love and adoption, have an innumerable multitude of children.

The Incarnation

God gave this gift of adopted sonship to man at the very dawn of his creation. But man lost it through the sin of **Adam**. Then, in a wonderful way, God in his love for man restored it again.

Here is how it was restored: At a definite point in the history of the human race the eternal Son of God united himself to our sinful humanity. He became man in the person of Jesus Christ, a man like us in all things but sin. The humanity of Jesus became the very humanity of the eternal Son of God. Jesus was a divine Person.

This is what we call the mystery of the *Incarnation*. The Son of God became man. St. John states it in a few simple but beautiful words which ought never be far from the thoughts of any Christian.

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

The Incarnation is central to the whole Christian Faith. We know from revelation that it was brought about by the Holy Spirit with the free consent and co-operation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. (See Luke 1:26-38). Now we can truly say that this man, who is called Jesus, is the eternal Son of God. Similarly we can say that the blessed Virgin Mary is in very truth the Mother of God. We profess our faith in this central mystery of the Incarnation when, in the creed at Mass, we proclaim:

**“For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and was made man”.**

Holiness

In the Incarnation the eternal Son of God became man. He is “the firstborn among many brethren”. (Roman 8:29). “To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God”. (John 1:12). The same divine life which proceeds from the Father into the Son, and from the Son into the humanity of Jesus, circulates from Christ in all who will accept him. All holiness consists in receiving the divine life from Christ, and retaining it, and growing in it by an ever increasing union with him.

Holiness means that the Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit enters in the dwells in the soul of each individual who receives him. Holiness means union with God, a

new life of divine adoption of sonship. It is a new kind of life by which we can in very truth call God "Our Father". (gal 4:6).

We will never understand this new life fully because it is super-natural (above natural life). Yet, our insights into it and the depth of our appreciation of it, can grow as we try more and more to live it. We know that the Holy Spirit, by whose power it was first transmitted to the humanity of Jesus, is the same Holy Spirit who causes it to flow into the souls of all who receive it. This is why prayerful devotion to the Holy Spirit is an important part of the Christian life.

Sanctifying Grace

The new life, which we receive from Christ through the Holy Spirit, is a completely free gift from God, given because of his great love for us. Because it is a *free* gift we call it *Grace*. Because it makes us holy, or sanctifies us, we call it *Sanctifying Grace*.

During later lessons there will be frequent reference to this profound reality which we call *Sanctifying Grace* or God's grace. The deeper your understanding and appreciation of what it means, the better will be your grasp of the later lessons, and of what it means to be a Christian. Extra care in the revision of this section before going on to later lessons is important.

When Catholics use the phrase "to be in the state of grace", they are referring to the possession of that free gift of divine life which we call Sanctifying Grace. To be in the state of grace is to have the divine gift of sanctifying grace in our souls.

The Mass and the Sacraments of the Church are the principal channels through which the Holy Spirit transmits sanctifying grace to us. Each of these will be explained in later lessons. We will see too that by living devout Christian lives men *grow* in sanctifying grace, that is, they become more fully united with the loving God.

Sanctifying Grace can be diminished or completely lost by sin. But even after it is lost it can be regained by sincere repentance. There is ample evidence in God's revelation to us that constant effort to live upright lives is necessary in order to retain and grow in Sanctifying Grace. Our own efforts do not actually produce this increase in grace, because it is God's *free* gift of sharing in his divine nature (II Peter 1:4), but God gives the increase to us as a reward for our efforts.

St Paul tells us that we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). This presupposes that it is always possible for the Christian to lose the gift of sanctifying grace. Although Paul says, "Be ye followers of me as I also

am of Christ", he also says in 1 Cor. 9:27, "I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified". There he very clearly has in mind the possibility of a Christian (Himself) losing the gift of Sanctifying Grace.

To live a life of holiness, i.e. the life of sanctifying grace is to live a new and wonderful way of life, a life of union with God. We Catholics remind ourselves of this very clearly in one of the prayers of the Mass when we say:

**"-----by rising from the dead,
he destroyed death and restored life.
And that we might live no longer for
ourselves but for him,
he sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father,
as his first gift to those who believe,
to complete his work on earth
and bring us the fullness of grace".**

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The driver of a taxi once said to a priest: "I have a mate who is a Catholic. He is a hard-working, practical man with a lot of common sense. But he does something which puzzles me. When he goes past a Catholic church he makes a sign in front of his face. I think you call it crossing yourself.

"I suppose he does it to ward off danger. It seems superstitious to me. It's not in keeping with his character and I wonder why he does it."

The priest replied:

"He is making the Sign of the Cross. This is a prayer. He traces on himself the cross to remind himself how Christ died to save the world. As he does so, he prays to the three Persons in one God. He touches his forehead saying: 'In the name of the Father,' his chest saying: 'And of the Son,' his left shoulder, then his right, saying: 'And of the Holy Spirit,' and he says, 'Amen' as he joins his hands.

"This practice probably dates back to the time of the Apostles. By it Catholics adore God three-in-one, put themselves under his protection and offer all their thoughts, words and deeds in his service."

"There is a lot more to it than I thought," was the taxi-driver's comment.

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HOW TO PRAY

Prayer is the Breath of Life

To breathe is to live; to cease to breathe is to die. The first and most necessary thing for the newly born infant is to begin to breathe; the life then begun ceases only with the cessation of breath. For the whole duration of time between the first and the last breath, life is sustained by breathing and, in fact, is strong or weak according as the breath is itself deep or shallow. Only as the body breathes does the body live.

What is said of the body and breath may be said of the soul and prayer. For the soul, to pray is to live; to cease to pray is to die. The first and most necessary thing for the soul is to turn to God its Maker who made it in His Own image for Himself – and to turn to God is to pray. Its whole life is to be attached to the very Principle of Life, which is God, that is to pray. Only as it prays does the soul live. Prayer is the breath of its life.

The motion of life comes before anything else. It is necessary to live before anything else is possible. All motion of mind or body issues from life as from its source, as water springs from a well. So it is with the Soul. The soul is holy only by the holiness of God. It is union with Him that enables the soul to draw its life from Him – and union with Him is prayer. Prayer then is the most vital thing imaginable for the soul. To pray is to live; not to pray is to die.

To think of prayer as the breath of life and as utterly indispensable as breath of life is to think of it as it should be thought of, and to pray accordingly is to pray as one should pray.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. Why in your opinion did God reveal the mystery of the Blessed Trinity to us?**
- 2. By what special claim can the Christian call God "Father"?**
- 3. In what sense is the Christian an adopted son of God?**
- 4. Why do we say the Incarnation is central to the whole Christian Faith?**
- 5. What in your opinion is the most important quality of holiness?**
- 6. In your own words explain what a Christian means by "Sanctifying Grace".**