

## The Holy Spirit in the Life of Catholic Voices

- I. We are now in the midst of the Church's annual novena (more precisely called a decenarium because it's really involved ten not nine days) following the Lord's Ascension instruction to pray "until you are clothed with power from on high" because "before many days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" and "receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you [so that] you shall be my witnesses... to the end of the earth." During these days, Christians throughout the centuries have sought to imitate the members of the early Church in huddling around Mary, the person who shows us precisely how to be docile to the Gift of the Holy Spirit who overshadowed her at the Annunciation and who never sought to run from that divine shadow. It's during these days we pray, "Veni Creator Spiritus, mentes tuorum visita," Come, Creator Spirit, visit the minds of your faithful, turn on our senses, inflame our hearts with love, strengthen our weak flesh to obey our willing spirit. It's in these days that we should be asking for the grace to live by the Spirit setting our minds on the things of the Spirit instead of according to the flesh. For us as Catholic Voices it's especially during these days that we should be asking him to give us "tongues of fire," so that we can proclaim the Gospel, so that we can be witnesses to the truth, with ardent love.
- II. The reality, however, is that the Holy Spirit remains the "great unknown" not just in the life of the faithful as a whole, but also in the life of Church communicators. In today's first reading, we see what happened when Paul came to Ephesus and met some disciples. He asked, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They responded, "We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." Pope Benedict, at World Youth Day in Australia in 2008, said, "The Holy Spirit has been in some ways the neglected person of the Blessed Trinity," and confessed that it was only as a young priest teaching theology that he began not only to recognize the importance that the Holy Spirit should play in his life as a priest and professor but that he came to know him intimately. He added, "It is not enough to know the Spirit; we must welcome Him as the guide of our souls, as the 'Teacher of the interior life' who introduces us to the Mystery of the Trinity, because He alone can open us up to faith and allow us to live it each day to the full." If we wish to understand the faith, if we wish to live it, if we wish to pass it on, we must allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, even if we, like Benedict, are beginning as adults. For us, the "great unknown" must become the "great known," the teacher, the leader, the consoler, the advocate.
- III. The importance of the Holy Spirit in our life as Catholics and Catholic voices cannot be overstated. Jesus said this to us during the Last Supper when he shockingly stated, "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." Jesus emphasized that it was good that he left us — imagine that — because in comparison with the gift of His presence, the gift of the Holy Spirit's presence in our life is more important. That's how crucial the Holy Spirit is meant to be in our life as disciples and apostles. Pope Benedict said, "The Holy Spirit is the highest gift of God to humankind."
- IV. I'd like to focus this morning on two ways we should always be seeking to grow in our docility to this highest gift of God.
- V. The first is in our prayer.
  - A. St. Paul tells us, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words." The Holy Spirit teaches us how to pray. He does this not principally by putting words in our minds and mouths to say, but changing who we are as we pray, helping us to be conscious of our reality as sons and daughters so that we can cry out "Abba, Father!" "Daddy!"
  - B. I've always been moved by how John Paul II said he prayed in the book length interview *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*.
    1. *CTH: I would like to return to the preceding question: How-and for whom, for what-does the Pope pray? You would have to ask the Holy Spirit! The Pope prays as the Holy Spirit permits him to pray. I think he has to pray in a way in which, deepening the mystery revealed in Christ, he can better fulfill his ministry. The Holy Spirit*

certainly guides him in this. But man must not put up obstacles. "The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness."

VI. We also need to be guided by the Holy Spirit in our giving witness to the faith.

- A. Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit he would send would teach us all things, lead us to all truth, remind us of everything he had taught us, and prove the world wrong about sin, holiness and judgment. He had said that when we are dragged before governors, and synagogues and courts, or into television and radio studios and into debates, "do not be anxious beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given to you in that hour, for it is not you who pray but the Holy Spirit."
- B. We see the miracle that occurred in the life of the apostles with the help of the Holy Spirit. The same apostles who 53 days before Pentecost had left the upper room only to scatter like frightened children in the Garden now left the Upper Room to gather God's children together for Christ. The same Peter who denied even knowing Jesus in order to keep himself warm by the courtyard fire, was now on fire confessing that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of the Living God. The disciples who were too ashamed to appear at the foot of the Cross now boldly and proudly proclaimed God's love seen by Christ's death on that Cross. It was the Holy Spirit that had effected the transformation from apostates to apostles, from cowards to courageous witnesses, from chickens to shepherds.
- C. Pope Benedict in 2008 said that this miraculous metamorphosis was an interior one. "The Holy Spirit renewed the Apostles from within, filling them with a power that would give them courage to go out and *boldly proclaim* that "Christ has died and is risen!" Freed from all fear, they began to speak openly with *self-confidence* (cf. *Acts* 2:29; 4:13; 4:29,31). These frightened fishermen had become courageous heralds of the Gospel. Even their enemies could not understand how "uneducated and ordinary men" (cf. *Acts* 4:13) could show such courage and endure difficulties, suffering and persecution with joy. Nothing could stop them. To those who tried to silence them they replied: "We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard" (*Acts* 4:20). This is how the Church was born, and from the day of Pentecost she has not ceased to spread the Good News "to the ends of the earth" (*Acts* 1:8).
- D. The Holy Spirit wants to work that same inner transformation in all of us.
  1. Blessed John Paul II said that the spreading and defending of the Gospel "demands a specific spirituality ... expressed first of all by a life of complete docility to the Spirit. It commits us to being molded from within by the Spirit, so that we may become ever more like Christ. It is not possible to bear witness to Christ without reflecting his image, which is made alive in us by grace and the power of the Spirit. This docility then commits us to receive the gifts of fortitude and discernment, which are essential elements of missionary spirituality. An example of this is found with the apostles during the Master's public life. Despite their love for him and their generous response to his call, they proved to be incapable of understanding his words and reluctant to follow him along the path of suffering and humiliation. The Spirit transformed them into courageous witnesses to Christ and enlightened heralds of his word. It was the Spirit himself who guided them along the difficult and new paths of mission. Today, as in the past, that mission is difficult and complex, and demands the courage and light of the Spirit. We often experience the dramatic situation of the first Christian community, which witnessed unbelieving and hostile forces "gathered together against the Lord and his Anointed" (*Acts* 4:26). Now, as then, we must pray that God will grant us boldness in preaching the Gospel; we must ponder the mysterious ways of the Spirit and allow ourselves to be led by him into all the truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13)." These are words that he not only taught but which he lived.
  2. Pope Paul VI talked even more expansively about this true "spirituality" by which God wants us to live and preach.
    - a. "It is the Holy Spirit who, today just as at the beginning of the Church, acts in every evangelizer who allows himself to be possessed and led by Him. The Holy Spirit places on his lips the words which he could not find by himself, and at the same time the Holy Spirit predisposes the soul of the hearer to be open and receptive to the Good News and to the kingdom being proclaimed. **Techniques of evangelization are good, but even the most advanced ones could not replace the gentle action of the Spirit**. The most perfect preparation of the evangelizer has no effect without the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit the most convincing dialectic has no power over the heart of man. Without Him the most highly developed schemas resting on a sociological or psychological basis are quickly seen to be quite valueless."

E. In our work as Catholic Voices, we can in particular look at our need for and cooperation with the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, on which hinge our effectiveness.

1. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are obviously needed in our work.
  - a. The gift of wisdom helps us to evaluate all things in the light of the truth, from God's own perspective, so that in seeing things clearly, we may help others to see.
  - b. The gift of knowledge helps us to come to know not only the truths of the faith but other truths, to remember them, to recall what the Lord Jesus, the great saints, said or did.
  - c. The gift of understanding fosters in us a deeper insight into the truth, so that, in seeing the connections between things, we can stimulate others to enter into the real, real world.
  - d. The gift of counsel or prudence helps us to grasp better our audience and how we can communicate the truths in a more persuasive, orderly way.
  - e. The gift of courage sustains us in hardship, helping us to move onward despite our natural human fears and to be dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit.
  - f. The gift of reverence revives in us the relationship of intimate communion with God and of trusting surrender to his Providence. It is key so that we become a more compelling message, someone whose existence and way of life reminds one of God, someone who sees in others "no mere mortal," to use CS Lewis' phrase, but someone infinitely loved by God, someone who sees in creation and even in suffering a mystery that can unite us to the divine, opening up our eyes and through us the eyes and hearts of others to grasp that the world is charged with the grandeur of God.
  - g. The gift of fear or better translated awe of the Lord gives us a greater sense of our human weakness and therefore of the indispensable role of divine grace.
2. When we live by the Spirit, we receive the fruits of the Spirit, which will obviously make us far more capable of communicating the truth, communicating a glimpse of divine reality, communicating God more attractively and compellingly. Just think about how winsome a Catholic Voice we would be if others could see in us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control.

F. In our last Mass together, as we reflect on the Holy Spirit in our life and work, we should examine our docility to the Holy Spirit. Pope Benedict told the young people of the world four years ago, "Test the quality of your faith in the Holy Spirit, rediscover it if it is lost, strengthen it if it has become weak, savor it as fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, brought about by the indispensable working of the Holy Spirit." St. Paul in his first letter to Thessalonians said, "Do not quench the Spirit!" because in some sense they obviously were limiting his work in them. To the Ephesians he said something even more powerful, imploring them, "Do not grieve the Spirit of God." How much believers grieve the Holy Spirit by their treating him as an unknown, or merely a theological concept. How much richer would their life be, how much effective would their task of witness be, how much stronger would the Church be, if we didn't grieve or quench the Holy Spirit!

VII. The Holy Spirit for which we pray with insistence during this decenarium comes to us new at every Mass. Just as he overshadowed Mary at the Annunciation, so he will overshadow this altar and me at the consecration to transform bread and wine into the eternal Son of God incarnate, and so he will overshadow all of us to make us one body, one Spirit in Christ. It's here in the same upper room in which Jesus gives his body and blood that the Holy Spirit comes. Pope Benedict said, "The Eucharist is a 'perpetual Pentecost' since every time we celebrate Mass we receive the Holy Spirit who unites us more deeply with Christ and transforms us into Him." If we wish to leave this Upper Room and carry out our mission as Catholic Voices, as Apostles of our own day, let us beg the Holy Spirit to fill us with tongues of fire, so that with passion, love and courage, we might bring Christ and his truth out to our world that so desperately needs it. "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love!" Amen!