

THE HOLY SPIRIT - Our Divine Guide and Strength

(C 687-747, USC Ch. 9)

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name ...he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you. (Jn 14:26)

*...We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son
he is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the prophets...*
(Nicene Creed)

In this article we will look at:

- The Spirit in the Old Testament
- The Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus
- The Holy Spirit in the early Church
- Gifts of the Holy Spirit
- Fruits of the Holy Spirit
- Names, images, symbols of the Holy Spirit
- Developing a relationship with the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God's *greatest gift* to help us transform our lives into the likeness of Christ. To be unaware of the Holy Spirit or not to have a relationship with him would be a huge loss in our spiritual lives.

The Spirit in the Old Testament (C 705-716)

The word spirit is from the Hebrew word *ruah*, which is usually translated as *breath, air* or *wind*. In Gen 2:7 we read: "... *the Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the **breath of life**, and so man became a living being.*" In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God is not revealed as a person, but as a divine force which transforms people and makes them capable of exceptional deeds, and acts as God's instrument in the lives of the people of Israel. "*Breath and spirit*" signifies the dynamic force under which a person acts. In 1Sm 6:13 we read how the "Spirit of the Lord comes mightily upon David" when Samuel anoints him.

The Spirit of the Lord is seen as a charismatic force when it comes upon the Judges of Israel (Jgs 3:10, 6:34, 11:29). The Spirit of the Lord settles upon the prophets enabling them to proclaim God's Word (Is 61:1, Jer 1:4). In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God is only given to *some* people: prophets, priests and kings, and only *partially*. After Pentecost, the Spirit is bestowed on *all* the people and no longer "by measure" but in his *fullness*. In Isa 11:2-3, the prophet says: "*The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord.*" These are

the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit that we learned about when preparing for the sacrament of Confirmation. These are permanent blessings that incline us to respond to the Holy Spirit's promptings and movement in our lives.

- **Wisdom** helps us to look at reality from God's point of view.
- **Understanding** enables us to reflect on the deeper meaning of our faith.
- **Knowledge** shows us how God is working in our lives and in the world.
- **Counsel** (right judgment) helps us to form our conscience in the light of Scripture and Church teaching.
- **Strength** (fortitude) emboldens us to follow our convictions.
- **Piety** moves us to respect the dignity and worth of others.
- **Fear of the Lord** (wonder and awe) instills in us respect for God and awareness of sin in our lives.

A climactic reference to the Spirit in the Old Testament is found in Jn 3:1-3. Writing about 400 BC, John prophesied a great new age of the Spirit: "*After this I will pour out my spirit on all mankind. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions. Even on slaves, men and women, will I pour out my spirit in those days.*"

Pause: Which of the above-mentioned gifts of the Spirit do you most desire in your life? Why?

The Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus (C 727-730)

Jesus comes to inaugurate this new age of the Spirit. Lk 1:35 tells us that Jesus is conceived in the womb of Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit. During John the Baptist's preaching ministry, he baptizes people with *water* but tells them that the one coming after him will baptize with the *Holy Spirit* (Mt 3:1-12). At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, he is anointed with the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:16).

In Lk 4:14, we are told that Jesus returns to Galilee in *the power of the Spirit*. Shortly after that, he pays a visit to the synagogue in his hometown. He unrolls the scroll and quotes a passage from Is 61:1-2: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.*"

Rolling up the scroll, Jesus says: “*Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing*” (Lk 4:14-21).

The Spirit has empowered Jesus in many ways throughout his public ministry, e.g., to preach and teach with authority, heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, spend nights in prayer, speak God’s truth to both religious and secular authorities, embrace the will of God no matter what the cost. As Jesus’ ministry progresses, he starts to speak about sharing his spirit with his followers: “*I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth*” (Jn 14:26). “*The advocate...will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you*” (Jn 14:25). In Acts 1:5, Jesus says: “*John baptized you with water, but in a few days you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit.*” Jesus even exhorts: “*It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor [the Holy Spirit] will not come to you...*” (Jn 16:7).

The Spirit’s presence in our lives is even better than if we had Jesus physically present with us. Why is this? “Christ himself can be more intimately present to us through his Holy Spirit than he was bodily to his Apostles. They knew him better— more intimately and more accurately *after* he left them and sent his Spirit. This is clear by comparing the Apostles, especially Peter, in the Gospels, with the same Apostles in Acts” (Peter Kreeft). Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit as teacher, guide and consoler.

Pause: *How have you experienced the Holy Spirit’s presence in your life?*

The Holy Spirit and the early Church

“*When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim*” (Acts 2:1-4).

These verses are the fulfillment of Joel’s prophesy and Jesus’ promise to baptize (immerse) people with the Holy Spirit. The impact of the Spirit on the disciples is so powerful that Peter had to give a homily explaining what is happening (Acts 2:14-41). He tells them that people are witnessing the fulfillment of God’s promise in their lives. Peter’s first homily is a great success. “*Those who accepted his message were baptized and about 3,000 persons were added that day*” (Acts 2:33). Not bad for the gruff fisherman who has never spent a day in a homiletics class.

The *Acts of the Apostles*, sometimes called the “Gospel of the Holy Spirit,” is a wonderful account of how the Holy Spirit is indeed a real mover and shaker in the early years of Christianity. As in the case of Jesus, the Holy Spirit empowers the Apostles to:

- teach and preach with authority (2:4)
- work signs and wonders (5:12)
- be fearless when arrested by the authorities (5:17-32)
- accept martyrdom for the sake of Jesus and die forgiving their executioners (7:54-60)
- develop a wonderful fellowship, moving many to sell all they had and give to the community (2:32-37)

Acts 15 is an account of the first Church Council, the Council of Jerusalem. During this important event, the Apostles are very aware of the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit (15:28).

Pause: *Assuming that you have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit, what helped you to become aware of the Holy Spirit’s presence in your life? How would you describe your current relationship with the Holy Spirit?*

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

A Spirit who gifts his Church for ministry (C 799-801, 1987-1989). “*As each of you has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace. Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ ...*” (1Pet 4:10-11).

To enable the universal Church, the diocesan Church and local Church to be truly the Body of Christ and carry forth his mission in the world, the Holy Spirit blesses the Church with a multitude of gifts for ministry. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are sometimes called *charisms*, a Greek word which means gift. A charism enables us to build up the body of Christ in our local or global world. In the New Testament Epistles, we find several references to the gifts or manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

The most extensive teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit is found in 1Cor 12-14. In these important chapters, Paul makes many significant points concerning the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and their role in the Church which he calls the Body of Christ.

1. In 1Cor 12:7, Paul declares: “*to each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.*” Traditionally, the phrase “for some benefit” has been interpreted to pertain to the local church or community. As such, the Holy Spirit does not give us gifts to build up *our* own kingdoms, but

to build up the *Kingdom of God* to strengthen the Body of Christ.

2. There is a *diversity* of gifts. Paul names some of the gifts in 1Cor 12:8-10, e.g. wisdom, healing, prophecy, tongues, mighty deeds. Other Gifts of the Spirit are named in 1Pt 4:10-11 and Rom 12:3-8.
3. Unity and diversity. In 1Cor 12:4, Paul stresses that all gifts come from the same Spirit. *“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit, there are different kinds of service but the same Lord, there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.”* In the Corinthian community, the exercise of the Gifts of the Spirit has become divisive and a cause for jealousy. In his body analogy (12:7-26), Paul tells us that all the parts of the body are important, and all are needed for the proper functioning of the whole body. So it is in the Body of Christ that the many Gifts of the Spirit are to be used—not to cause division but to bring unity and strength to the Body of Christ.
4. In 1Cor 13, Paul reminds the Corinthians and us that all gifts must be used with love and that the greatest gift of all is love. Without love, we are nothing but “noisy gongs” (13:1). A challenge for each of us is to spend some time in prayer reflecting on what gift(s) the Holy Spirit has blessed us with, what we are doing, or what we can do to develop our gifts, and how we are using our gifts to bless our parishes and communities.

Pause: *What gift of the Spirit has the Lord blessed you with? Is there a particular gift that you wish you had?*

Can we imagine how powerful our parishes would be if every baptized person was in tune with his/her manifestation or gift(s) of the Spirit, and if everyone worked and prayed hard to *develop* his/her gifts and then shared them generously with the local communities. Our parishes would be blessed with gifted teachers and preachers, gifted administrators, prayer warriors, leaders, hospitality ministers, people to lead and organize social justice ministries, etc. Most parishes today need a lot more formation when it comes to helping people to be aware of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and helping them to *develop* and *share* their gifts.

Pause: *What Gifts of the Spirit do you see in operation in our parish? What Gift of the Spirit is not in operation, that you wish it was?*

Fruits of the Holy Spirit - signs of holiness (C 2012-2016)

The presence and operation of the Gifts of the Spirit are *not* necessarily tangible signs of holiness. If we want to see what a *holy* person looks like, look for the presence of what St. Paul calls the “*Fruits of the Spirit*.” Paul lists nine fruits: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* (Gal 5:22-23). In contrast to these tangible signs of holiness, Paul lists fifteen signs of the “fruits of the flesh”: envy, selfishness, anger, divisiveness, hate, etc. (5:18-21). Paul gives us these “two orchards” to help us to see if we are living our lives in the spirit of Christ or in the spirit of the world.

Pause: *Which of the nine Fruits of the Spirit is most operative in your life? Which fruit do you wish you could do better at?*

Names, images and symbols of the Holy Spirit (C 691-701)

In the scriptures we find several names, images and symbols referring to the Holy Spirit and his activity in the world. The following are some of them:

Wind. The Spirit is frequently symbolized as wind: the wind blowing through the valley of dry bones, reconnecting them and breathing new life into them (Ez 37:4-10); the wind blowing through the house where the disciples are gathered at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). In Jn 3:8, Jesus says: *“The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”* In these words, Jesus is saying to us that the Spirit is present among us in an invisible but very active way. We cannot control the Spirit’s presence, but we can experience his presence and activity in our lives and in our world.

Fire. Fire has the potential to destroy, purify and transform. So does the presence of the Spirit within us. He can help us to overcome the destructiveness of sin, purify us of ungodly behaviors, and transform us into the likeness of Christ. Fire also gives light. Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to enlighten us about the true ways of God. He is our divine inner light. On Pentecost Sunday, the “tongues of fire” which descended on the Apostles gave them the power to speak in many languages.

Water. Water, like wind and fire, has no definite shape, but it is the nourishing matrix of all life. Life on earth began in the seas and human life begins in the water of the womb. In Ez 36:25-26, God promises that the people will be renewed in the Spirit as by a refreshing shower: *“I will sprinkle clean water upon you ...”* In

Jn 4:14, Jesus promises the Samaritan woman the gift of the Spirit through the metaphor of “living water.” In Jn 3:5, Jesus says to Nicodemus: “*Amen, Amen I say to you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.*” The Church has taken these words to refer to the sacrament of Baptism which destroys sin in us and floods us with the new life of God. The waters of Baptism initiate us into the Church, the Body of Christ, and bestows on us the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

Dove. In the story of the Great Flood (Gn 7-8), a dove released by Noah returns to the Ark with an olive tree branch to show that the flood waters are receding. At Jesus’ baptism, the Holy Spirit descends on him in the form of a dove. The dove image may have symbolized the end of the reign of sin and its destruction. It also symbolizes peace. In Jesus, harmony between heaven and earth will be restored and the waters of death will recede before him.

Advocate/Paraclete. *Advocate* is a term ascribed to a defender in court, a vindicator (Job 19:25). Jesus tells his disciples not to worry on what they will say in court for he would grant them an Advocate who will inspire them. The Advocate is also called the Spirit of Truth (Jn 16:14-26), the one who will lead the Church into the fullness of the truth that Jesus comes to bring. This Advocate is our comforter and guide as we journey through life.

Laying on of hands. The gesture of laying on of hands is usually performed by one or more persons praying for one or more persons for the imparting of the Spirit (Acts 8:17, 19:6). It is also associated with ordination (1Tm 4:14) and with invocation for healing of the sick (Acts 9:12).

Pause: Which of the above images or symbols of the Spirit appeals to you most? Why?

Developing a relationship with the Holy Spirit

Attentiveness and responsiveness to the Spirit. One way to describe the goal of spiritual life is to become more attentive and responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. The more attentive and responsive we grow to the invitation of the Holy Spirit, the more we will become like Jesus. How can we facilitate this growth in our lives?

- *Develop a reflective lifestyle.* It has been rightly said that an unreflective life is not worth living. Take time out for “reflective pauses” in the flow of our day to ask the questions: What is going on in this situation? What might God be saying to me in this experience? Taking time to sit with these questions is an excellent

way to develop a reflective lifestyle which will help us to become more in tune with and responsive to the Spirit’s presence and activity in our lives and in the world.

- *Connect with others who have a strong relationship with the Holy Spirit.* We can make this connection through reading or by joining a small group of people who seek to live God-centered lives.

Pause: Name one thing you can do to improve your relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Action suggestions

If you have a strong relationship with the Holy Spirit, be grateful and pray that it continues to grow. If not, consider acting on some of the suggestions in this article to develop a formidable bond with the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

Meditation

The Spirit comes gently and makes himself known by his fragrance. He is not felt as a burden, for he is light. Rays of light and knowledge stream before him as he approaches. The Spirit comes with a tenderness of a true friend and protector to save, to heal, to teach, to counsel, to strengthen, to console. The Spirit comes to enlighten our mind and through [us], the minds of others....

As light strikes the eyes of one who comes out of darkness into the sunshine and enables him to see clearly things he could not discern before, so light of the Spirit floods our souls and enables us to see clearly things...beyond the range of human vision, things hitherto undreamed of.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

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