

Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

October 21, 2018, Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Divine Personhood of the Holy Spirit

Question: "Why does the Catholic Church claim that the Holy Spirit is a Person? The Holy Spirit is not a Person but the active power that God uses to accomplish His will. It is an impersonal force, like radio waves.

Answer: Contrary to this view (common, for example, among Jehovah's Witnesses), Sacred Scripture indicates that the Holy Spirit is a Person, not just some impersonal force."

Impersonal forces do not know things or make choices, but the Holy Spirit does both. The Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of God the Father (1 Cor 2:11). The Holy Spirit thus has the personal attributes of intellect and will.

Sacred Scripture refers to the Holy Spirit as a Paraclete (Greek *parakletos*; see Jn 14:26; also, Jn 15:26 and Jn 16:7-8). This term, often translated as "Comforter," "Counselor," or "Advocate," refers to a *person* who is called to aid one, especially in legal settings. Sacred Scripture also speaks of Jesus, Who is unmistakably a Person, as a Paraclete (see 1 Jn 2:1).

Impersonal forces cannot communicate, but Sacred Scripture refers to the Holy Spirit communicating (see Acts 5:32, 20:23, 21:11; also 1 Tim 4:1). Sometimes the Holy Spirit is directly quoted (Acts 8:29, 10:19, 21:11; see also Rev 14:13). The Holy Spirit is even quoted using the personal pronoun *I*: "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for *me* Barnabas and Saul for the work to which *I* have called them.'" (Acts 13:2)

This is particularly significant because the Holy Spirit is directly quoted in the historical narrative of Acts; the Holy Spirit is quoted just like any other person, and the quotation simply cannot be dismissed as symbolic. This is straightforward historical narrative.

Sacred Scripture thus depicts the Holy Spirit with intellect and will, as a Person Who (like Jesus Christ) assists Christians, and as a Person Who communicates and does so using the personal pronoun *I*. The claim that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force, therefore, is clearly not supported by the irrefutable historicity of the biblical text.

The Holy Spirit, furthermore, is a *divine* Person, and truth of the Holy Spirit's divinity is certainly implied in Sacred Scripture. One of the most important passages in Sacred Scripture concerning the doctrine of the Holy Trinity contains the formula that Jesus indicates is to be used in Baptism: "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." (Mt 28:19) This passage places the Holy Spirit alongside the Father and the Son.

Other biblical passages also associate the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:16-17; Jn 14:16-17, 25-26; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pt 1:2), but the Trinitarian formula used in Baptism is particularly clear, as it speaks of them directly, in sequence, in a simple formula.

Such passages, therefore, indicate that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have something in common – and that is: divinity.

The Father clearly is acknowledged as God (the entirety of the Old Testament testifies to this); the Son also is God, as the Gospel narratives clearly reveal. If Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are included in the same grouping in the biblical text, the logical conclusion is that what they all have in common, again, is their divinity.

The divinity of the Holy Spirit is further indicated by the fact that the Holy Spirit is said to be "the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:11) and the fact that the Holy Spirit is eternal (Heb 9:14). God's Spirit can only be God and only God is eternal.

- Fr. Lewis