

Living the Spirit The Holy Spirit

As we come close to the end of this formal Year of Faith I want to conclude with a summary of some thoughts on the Holy Spirit. Faith is the blessing that has brought us to know about (and so have a knowing relationship with) both the Father and the Son. Our faith is a belief that God is certainly One, but also Triune – with Three Persons in the Blessed Trinity.

At our Sunday liturgies we profess our faith by reciting the Creed. In it we confess: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.”

In past inserts I have written about the Holy Spirit. I do not wish to simply repeat all that I may have written there. I am aware, as many of you are, that there is always a time when a group of our young people is preparing for Confirmation. At that time they study what it means to know about God as the Holy Spirit. The first truth we may have learned is likely that He is the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. We would also have been made aware that He is distinct from both the Father and the Son. Yet, He is true God.

Do you recall what I said recently about attribution? In our speaking of God we attributed various works that are external to God to one or other Person of the Trinity. To the Father we attribute the work of creation. To the Son we attribute our redemption. But the fact is that all three Persons are at work in bringing about creation and redemption. What do we attribute in a special way to the Holy Spirit?

Going back to my old theology manual I found several places where this is mentioned. I will not write the citation in Latin. You can trust my translation, since it is very easy Latin. The text reads that appropriation of some work or attribute often is made to one Person above the others. The example given is that “love is essentially a work of all Three Persons,” but “love in a special way is appropriated to the Holy Spirit, because He proceeds from love [or “by the way of love”].

In our Catholic theology there is much study of the intimate life of God. Of course, we are relying on faith to enlighten what we cannot come to know solely through our very human efforts. Let me simply cite some passages of Scripture here.

“The Spirit of the Lord has spoken through me; the God of Israel spoke to me.” (2 Kings 23,2). “The holy men of God spoke, inspired by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 2,1). “At sundry times, God spoke by the prophets.” (Hebrews, 1,1). In these texts we see how we attribute to the Holy Spirit the revelation we have through prophecy. That same attribution is often enough still made when we speak of what inspires the preachers and teachers of the faith in our own day.

In the intimate or inner life of the Divinity, much is made by theologians of how the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This is a matter that has led the Church to great division. It is, it seems to me, [at a personal level], an unworthy matter to cause such disunion to continue. The Eastern Church insists that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. The Latin Church says He proceeds from both the Father and the Son. The whole dispute is called the *Filioque* dispute. I think it unworthy because there is really little consequence to practical theology from either position.

Other texts deserve our reflection. From them we learn how the Spirit is Advocate, Paraclete, the Spirit of truth etc. “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him; the Spirit of wisdom and understanding; the Spirit of counsel and fortitude; the Spirit of knowledge and godliness.” (Isaiah 11,2-3). “Know you not that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you.?” (1Cor 3, 16). “He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (John 20,22).

From such texts we learn about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We, then, should give honor to Him for being the giver of so many gifts and graces to us. He gives us the gift of life that is more than bodily life. In baptism the Holy Spirit with the Father and Son endows us with faith, hope and charity. These are infused virtues, waiting to grow and develop as we live our eternal destiny.

We should be aware that the Holy Spirit brings us many blessings. Though translated in various ways, the meaning of their description is not in doubt. Let me use an older version. “The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity.... Mildness, faith, modesty, continency and chastity.” (Gal 5,22-23).

There can be no doubt that our progress in the spiritual life depends greatly on the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is alive and acting in history. It is He who brings to our world the graces we experience. Indeed, grace is defined as the “indwelling of the Holy Spirit given to us.” He works in many ways, some quite diverse.

We may reflect on how the Spirit appeared as a dove at the Baptism of Jesus. We surely know that Jesus gave the Spirit to His Apostles on Easter Sunday. Again on that first Pentecost Sunday the Spirit appeared as tongues of fire, energizing those who received him to begin their public mission to announce the good news.

The “tongues of fire” image causes us to pray today that the Spirit will enkindle in us the fire of His love. By that love we bring about a renewal of the face of the earth. In receiving the Spirit we are changed, and we will never be the same. Indeed, an indelible mark is devised by theologians to describe this effect of receiving the gift of God.

In these days of celebrating Faith, let us think of how the Spirit has touched our lives. Let us remind ourselves of what Baptism actually means. Let us realize the supernatural life that has begun in us because of the love of the Spirit given us.

This is a time to celebrate our ordinary gifts of grace. We must not overlook them or disregard them. Some may think that the work of the Spirit applies only to individuals. The fact is that the Spirit renews the face of the earth. He does so by many single acts of multitudes of those elected to the work of evangelization. We are so called to share this work. It is for us to spread faith, each as one called and as a community of believers. Our love is to embrace others.

I hope that you will take a few moments to think how good God has been to you. Think of the graces you have received and let them uplift your spirit. Know that your life has a meaning deeper than what is material or bodily. See how you are given the vocation to be a follower of Jesus. See how marriages are made holy. See how priests are empowered to bring us the presence of Christ in special ways. See how the Church is protected against error. For all this, let us say Thank God!

May you know peace and joy and all the gifts of this gentle loving Spirit!

God love you always!

Monsignor David Morrison

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