

The Holy Spirit

In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. ~ Ephesians 1:13-14

THE HOLY SPIRIT is the third person of the Blessed Trinity. The Father infinitely loves the Son and the Son infinitely loves the Father. The communion of their love is not a power or energy, but a real Person, the Holy Spirit. “God is love” (see 1 Jn 4:8) and the identity of this love defines the person of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord and Giver of Life

Co-equal with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is present in all of God’s saving works (see Hg 2:5). The Holy Spirit has been present in this world since the first moment of creation. He is the principle of life, and without him nothing would exist or continue to be. When the “*earth was without form and void,*” it was “*the Spirit of God [who] was moving over the face of the waters*” (Gn 1:2). Adam did not become “*a living being*” until God “*breathed*” his Spirit into him (Gn 2:7). Scripture says: “*In him we live and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:28), which reveals to us that the Holy Spirit is the lord and giver of life. His immanent presence, authorship of life, and signs manifested in Scripture provide the keys to understanding who he is, his role in salvation history, and our relationship with him.

The Holy Spirit in Salvation History

As the story of salvation unfolds in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit is present, guiding the faithful such as Joseph (see Gn 41:38), Joshua (see Nm 27:18), David (see 1 Sm 16:13), and Ezekiel (see Ez 11:24), revealing God and his plan, and preparing the People of God for the com-

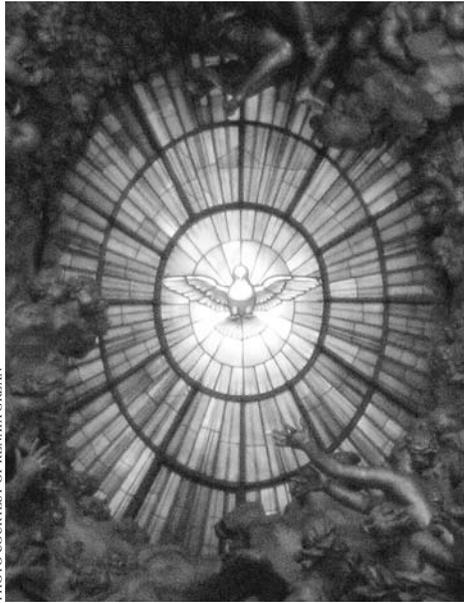


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Alabaster stone window in the apse of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, dating from the 16th century

ing of Jesus. Because the Holy Spirit authors all life, it makes sense that he is also the one who sanctifies it. Throughout the Old Testament, he is called upon to make things holy and anoint certain individuals, such as David, for a special purpose.

The New Testament also begins with the action of the Holy Spirit. When the angel came to Mary to invite her to become the Mother of God, he told her that “*[t]he Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you*” (Lk 1:35), sanctifying her womb and making it divinely fertile. After Jesus’ baptism by his cousin St. John the Baptist, he is anointed

by the Holy Spirit (see Mk 1:9-11). It is not until after this anointing that Jesus begins his public ministry. When Jesus opened up the Old Testament to read in the synagogue in Nazareth, he proclaimed, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.*” And he closed the book ... And he began to say to them, “*Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*” (Lk 4:18-21, citing Is 61:1-2). Throughout his public ministry, Jesus promised that all those who believed in him would also receive the Holy Spirit (see Jn 7:37-39).

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to the Church after he ascended into heaven: “*If I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you*” (Jn 16:7).

Just before ascending into heaven, he again promised that the Holy Spirit would come in his fullness

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to strengthen the Church (see Acts 1:8). At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell like fire from heaven upon the gathered apostles and disciples (see Acts 2:1-4). He has remained with the Church ever since and will stay with her until the end of time.

It is the Holy Spirit who gives power to the sacraments; without him, they would be empty rituals. It is the Holy Spirit who safeguards the Church and keeps her from falling into error. The Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier, and he mediates his power through the Church, giving her life and vitality. He is always present, and he will never leave because he has been sent by Jesus to be with the Church until the end of time.

Signs and Manifestations of the Holy Spirit

“When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:15). Fostering our relationship with him draws us closer into the communion of God’s family as his children. To do that, we need to understand how the Holy Spirit makes himself present to us. What are the signs of his presence and how was he manifested in Scripture? Answers to these questions will help us become more aware of his presence and teach us about our relationship with him.

Signs

Water: This symbol signifies the work of the Holy Spirit in Baptism; as water cleanses the body, the Holy Spirit cleanses the soul from original sin. His presence remains in us as the source of our divine life. *“But whoever*

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er drinks of the water that I [Jesus] shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal

life” (Jn 4:14).

Oil: In the Old Testament, oil was used to anoint the priests, the prophets, and the kings of Israel. Jesus, the Messiah, was “the Anointed One.” In Baptism and Confirmation, oil is used to signify our union with Christ. Christians share in the priesthood of Christ, and in his prophetic and royal mission. *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (1 Pt 2:9).

Manifestations

Fire: God led his people Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night (see Ex 13:21). When Israel was tempted to idolatry, the prophet Elijah challenged the priests of Baal to a showdown: the God who answered by fire would be acknowledged as the true God. When the

idol-god Baal failed, Elijah commanded the sacrifice to be soaked three times with four jarsful of water. Elijah prayed to God and fire came from Heaven and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stone altar, and even the water that had run onto the ground (see 1 Kgs 18:16-40). This is the same “fire from Heaven” that descended on the apostles on the Day of Pentecost. Fire consumes everything it touches. Similarly, anything yielded to the Holy Spirit is caught up into God’s life (see CCC 1127).

Wind/Breath: This sign reminds us of the mystery of the Holy Spirit. We cannot ex-



Espoused to St. Joseph, by Bartolomé Murillo, 1617-1682



*“By sending us the Son
and the Holy Spirit,
the Father gave us the
‘best portion’ of all that
he has to give us.”*

perience his presence with our senses, or control his movement by our own will. *“The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit”* (Jn 3:8). The breath of God imparts life to all it touches: Adam and Eve received human life from the breath of God (see Gn 2:7); Jesus breathed on his apostles and they received the Holy Spirit (see Jn 20:22-23). The Holy Spirit inspired (“breathed into”) the Holy Scriptures.

The Dove: The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove at his Baptism (see Jn 1:32). This was a sign given to St. John the Baptist that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. The symbol reminded the Jews of the Great Flood, when a dove sent out by Noah returned with an olive branch as evidence that the waters had receded and the earth was again habitable (see Gn 8:10-11). The dove is one of the most common symbols of the Holy Spirit in Christian art and literature. It speaks to us of the purity and gentleness of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit: Our Guarantee and Hope

In our Baptism, Jesus *“has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee”* (2 Cor 1:22). The Holy Spirit is our guarantee and the reason for why we hope. Jesus promised to send him to the Church after he ascended into Heaven. *“[I]f I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you”* (Jn 16:7). At Pentecost, Jesus fulfilled his promise and the disciples received the Holy Spirit who has stayed with the Church ever since and will stay with her until the

end of time. The Spirit is our hope because he comes to guide us into all truth, convince the world of Jesus, and prove the world wrong about sin (see Jn 16:8-13). Everything that Jesus has, the Father has given to the Holy Spirit for the sake of his Church. He holds all the aces to life’s most difficult situations and cannot be defeated. His presence in our lives is the guarantee and assurance of all that has been revealed and promised to us in Christ.

As a guarantee the Holy Spirit is like a pledge, a first installment of all those gifts that the Father will pour out upon us when we reach Heaven. And not just any gift but the “first fruits” of our inheritance. When Israel was commanded to offer in sacrifice to God the “first fruits” of their crops and livestock, they were giving him the best portion of all that they had. By sending us the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Father gave us the “best portion” of all that he has to give us.

Life in the Holy Spirit fulfills our vocation here on earth. Through the power of the Spirit, *“we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading”* (1 Pt 1:3-4). The Spirit enables us to share in the Kingdom of Heaven here and now. *“[L]ove, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* (Gal 5:22-23) are all fruits of the Spirit and blessed attitudes (or beatitudes) of the saints in Heaven which we share in because of the Holy Spirit. He is the Father’s greatest gift to us.

(CCC 243-245, 484-486, 683-741, 1107, 1699, 2657)