



**God's love has been poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. Rom 5:5**

The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts

The heart of the spiritual life is the realization that God is always present. This divine presence is revealed to us through creation and through sacred Scripture. As we observe God's world and as we read the inspired Scriptures, we perceive God's animating presence more and more, until we can say with the psalmist, "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?" (Ps 139:7).

The Holy Spirit works invisibly within us, always making God's outward revelation inward in us. God's Spirit works in our minds, giving knowledge, and in our hearts, giving love. These two complementary and inseparable ways that the Spirit is manifested to us correspond to the two great pronouncements about God's inner nature in John's letters: "God is light" (1 John 1:5) and "God is love" (1 John 4:8). As a shining light, the Spirit leads disciples to the fullness of truth, overcoming ignorance and offering understanding of God's revelation. As fervent love, the Spirit guides disciples to an intimate relationship with God, conquering our greed and fostering generosity and compassion.

The Holy Spirit works within us to make us see God in a new way—not as a taskmaster who impedes our freedom, but as the personal source of our deepest joy. As a new relationship with God is formed within us, the Holy

Spirit teaches us two pivotal realities in the depths of our hearts: to speak to God as Abba, Father, and to know Jesus as Kyrios, Lord.

What God's Spirit did in the life of Jesus—giving him the experience of his own relationship as Son to the Father and moving him in the depths of his heart to cry “Abba!”—the Spirit continues in us. In the Holy Spirit, we realize that the transcendent Creator of the world is an intimate parent to us. By pouring the love of God into our hearts, the Holy Spirit makes known the Father's love within us. As Paul tells us, “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal 4:6). The Spirit gives us not just an abstract knowledge of God's love, but the interior experience of God's personal and intense love for us.

The Holy Spirit also brings us to an interior awareness that Jesus Christ is risen and alive. When the Spirit descended upon the church at Pentecost, the meaning of Christ's life became clear to the disciples, and Peter was able to proclaim him as “both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). God's Spirit does the same for us, enlightening us within and bearing witness to the full revelation of God in Christ. In the words of Paul, “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3).

Reflection and discussion

- What do I already know about the nature of the Holy Spirit?

- What does it mean to me to call God “Abba” and to call Jesus “Lord”?

Natural Symbols of the Spirit: Wind, Water, Fire, and Oil

The biblical name for Spirit in Hebrew is *ruach*, a word which can mean either wind or breath, in addition to spirit. The Greek word, *pneuma*, and the Latin word, *spiritus*, also express the multiple senses of wind, breath, and Spirit.

The wind is a sweeping force that cannot be contained, and thus, the image of the wind expresses the power, freedom, and transcendence of God's Spirit. Breath, on the other hand, is what is most intimate, inward, and personal, so the image of breath conveys the gentleness, peacefulness, and immanence of the Spirit. In the Acts of the Apostles, the Spirit is manifested at Pentecost with a strong, rushing wind (2:2). In John's gospel, Jesus breathes on his disciples and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22). The Holy Spirit personifies this mystery of God's presence, which is both awesome power and overwhelming tenderness, a divine presence that inspires in people both reverent fear and irresistible attraction.

Since water is so closely associated with life and renewal, it has become in the Scriptures a sacramental expression of God's Spirit. God promises to pour out his Spirit as he pours water on thirsty land (Isa 44:3). Jesus referred to the Spirit as a river of living water which believers would receive (John 7:38–39). When the desert of our soul cries out to God, he pours out the refreshing Spirit of new life. Jesus described entry into God's kingdom as "being born of water and Spirit" (John 3:5). In the early church, the waters of baptism expressed the grace of the Holy Spirit bringing a believer into the Christian life.

Fire is another natural element that becomes a scriptural symbol for God's Spirit. John the Baptist proclaimed that Jesus would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt 3:11). Luke reported that tongues of fire rested on the disciples at Pentecost as they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:3–4). Only what is precious is tested by fire to purify it, gold among material things and faith among spiritual realities (1 Pet 1:7). God's fiery Spirit destroys our impurity and cleanses us through and through, making us shine like gold. Then after accomplishing its purifying effect, the fire of the Spirit warms us with God's affection and sets us aflame with fervor. The radical change experienced by the fearful disciples when they received the Holy Spirit demonstrates the transforming effects of the Spirit's fire. The remedy for lukewarm, apathetic Christianity is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The flame of the Spirit enlightens our minds with wisdom and enkindles our hearts with zeal.

Olive oil scented with perfume became the sacred chrism by which the priests, kings, and prophets of Israel were anointed. This anointing with oil conferred an inner power and transformation that became increasingly associated with God's Spirit. This link between anointing and the Spirit is exemplified in the text of Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me" (61:1). At his baptism, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit as the long-awaited messianic priest, prophet, and king. As the Christ, the Anointed One, Jesus' entire ministry was lived in the Spirit until he poured out that Spirit upon the church through his death and resurrection. Now, through the Spirit of the risen Christ, the church is the body of Christ, and all the people of God are anointed in the Holy Spirit by faith and baptism. From this baptismal anointing in the Spirit we are made Christians and partake in Christ's messianic work in the world.

Reflection and discussion

- Why does God choose to reveal the Spirit's presence and power through the natural elements of the created world? Through what natural symbol do I most experience the Holy Spirit?
- In what way does the Hebrew meaning of Spirit convey two different but complementary aspects of the Spirit's presence?

The Spirit's Work from Creation to New Creation

This study of the Holy Spirit will examine four different sections of the biblical literature. First, we will look at God's Spirit in the Old Testament. We will then see the way that three different New Testament writers—Luke, John, and Paul—express the work of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's many gifts.

The Spirit is first manifested in the Bible as God's creative presence, the wind sweeping over the chaotic waters at creation (Gen 1:2) and the divine breath which animates the creation of humanity (Gen 2:7). As the Spirit is revealed through the prophets, God's Spirit is described as that divine presence which continually enlivens and renews creation, bringing all things eventually to their perfection. The Holy Spirit is not confined to God's revelation in Israel or even the church, but the Spirit's sphere of activity is as wide as creation itself: "The spirit of the Lord has filled the world" (Wis 1:7). Wherever people search for truth, goodness, and beauty, God's Spirit is the source of that pursuit. Thomas Aquinas said, "Every truth, no matter what its source is said to be, comes from the Holy Spirit." In the hearts of all people, the Holy Spirit works to bring people to ask the basic questions that stimulate the human quest for God.

Luke begins his gospel by announcing that God's Son would be conceived in the womb of Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit. Through this universal Spirit, Jesus would be not only the Messiah of Israel but the Savior of the world. As he begins the Acts of the Apostles, Luke announces the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the church gathered in Jerusalem. This outpouring of God's Spirit not only fulfills God's promises to Israel, but initiates the universal work of the new creation. The Spirit that filled Jesus throughout his earthly ministry is unleashed upon the newborn church in wind and fire, animating its witness "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

In John's gospel, the Spirit is called the Paraclete, or Advocate, and is the continuing presence of the glorified Jesus in his disciples. In one amazing passage, Jesus declares, "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you" (John 16:7). In the Holy Spirit, God's presence is not limited to any one time or place, as it was in the bodily presence of Jesus. Through the Spirit, the glorified Jesus is present to every time and culture, just as present today as in the lives of his first disciples. The Paraclete is also called "the Spirit of truth," who will guide the church through the ages "into all the truth" (John 16:13). Because there were many things that

the disciples could not understand during the earthly life of Jesus, the Spirit would provide new insights and guidance for the church in every time and culture. Only the post-resurrection gift of the Holy Spirit taught the disciples the full meaning of what they had seen and heard in Jesus, and the Spirit empowered them to be witnesses by speaking through them.

The letters of Paul contain numerous insights into the work of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the lives of disciples. The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, and we are adopted into the family of God. The Christian life is “life in the Spirit,” which is a foretaste of the fullness of life that awaits us. The Spirit intercedes for us, even praying within us, and gives us a desire to praise God. As we live in the Spirit, our lives are filled with the characteristics of divine life: faithfulness, generosity, peace, joy, and especially love. Paul’s writings show how the Holy Spirit bestows a variety of spiritual gifts upon the church. Each member of the church is given unique and diverse gifts for the service of others and for the good of the church. The Spirit offers these gifts of divine grace and coordinates them so that they work together in harmony. Like the many different instruments in an orchestra that contribute their own part to the symphony, the spiritual gifts of each member play their part in the movement and harmony of the whole. Together, the Spirit’s gifts contribute to the church’s glorious masterpiece of praise to God.

Reflection and discussion

- What expresses for me the universality of God’s Spirit? What indicates that the Holy Spirit works through human expressions of religion, science, art, and music?

- What are the similarities and difference between personal talents and gifts of the Spirit? In what way do these sometimes work together in my life?

The Inspiration of the Holy Spirit

God is revealed to us through created things and inspired words. These two “books” of revelation, the creation that we see and the Scriptures that we read, make God known through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. The wonder of creation becomes a kind of universal sacrament, revealing the wonder of God and leading us to God’s life, when we look upon it with the guidance of the Spirit. The Bible reveals the love of God and God’s desire to share divine life with us when we read and understand under the direction of the Spirit.

Reading the Bible without the Holy Spirit is like opening a book in the dark. The same Spirit, who inspired the authors of the Scriptures, guides us as we read and reflect upon the biblical passages. When we pray to the Holy Spirit before reading Scripture and read in an atmosphere of trusting faith, the sacred text can come alive with freshness and personal significance. The same Spirit, who comes upon the created gifts of bread and wine so that they become for us the living Christ, hovers over the biblical texts so that they become the living word of God.

Reflection and discussion

- When have I experienced the Spirit’s work in revealing God to me through creation or Scripture?

- In what way do I want the Holy Spirit to work in my life as I study this work?

Prayer

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, and use me. I want to understand your energizing presence and open my life more fully to your power. Stir up within me the grace of my baptism in Christ and animate your gifts within me for the service of God's people. Enlighten and encourage me as I read and contemplate your inspired word in these sacred Scriptures. Show me how to make my life a testimony to God's love.