

Paul, the Holy Spirit, and Prayer (16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

Romans 8:26-27—The Spirit Intercedes for the Saints

²⁶ Likewise *the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.* ²⁷ And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because *the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.* (Romans 8:26-27)

1. The Spirit: “the spirit” (Greek *to pneuma*) (8:26)

The grace of *the Lord Jesus Christ* and the love of *God* and the fellowship of *the Holy Spirit* be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)

2. Too Deep for Words: “sighs” or “groanings” (Greek *stenagmos*) (8:26; cf. Acts 7:34)

3. Indwelling:

If *the Spirit* of him who raised Jesus from the dead *dwells in you*, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through *his Spirit who dwells in you.* (Romans 8:11)

4. Intercession: “intercede” or “make an appeal” (Greek *entungkanō*) to God the Father:

The Spirit *intercedes for the saints* according to the will of God. (Romans 8:27)

It is *Christ Jesus*, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed *intercedes for us.* (Romans 8:34)

5. Saints: “saints” or “holy ones” (Greek *hagioi*) (8:27) = Paul’s favorite term for ‘believers’ in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1:1)

The Living Tradition

Augustine: “We do not know how to pray as we ought” for two reasons. *First, it is not yet clear what future we are hoping for or where we are heading, and second, many things in this life may seem positive but are in fact negative, and vice versa.* Tribulation, for example, when it comes to a servant of God in order to test or correct him may seem futile to those who have less understanding... But God often helps us through tribulation, and prosperity, which may be negative if it traps the soul with delight and the love of this life, is sought after in vain.” (Augustine, *On Romans* 54; trans. Gerald Bray)

Catechism: *the Holy Spirit is the master of the interior life.* (CCC 1995)

Catechism: [*H*]umility is the foundation of prayer. Only when we humbly acknowledge that “we do not know how to pray as we ought,” [Rom 8:26] are we ready to receive freely *the gift of prayer*. (CCC 2559)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. When Paul speaks about “the Spirit,” to whom is he referring?

2. According to Paul, what role does the Holy Spirit play in the prayer of a Christian?

For Further Reading

1. Gerald Bray, ed. *Romans* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VI; Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1998).
2. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans* (trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P.; eds. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012).
2. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 11 (ed. Philip Schaff; repr.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994).