



SESSION 8

I Believe in the Holy Spirit



SESSION OBJECTIVES

The Holy Spirit, Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal

- To understand the Holy Spirit as the third Person of the Holy Trinity and the Love between the Father and the Son
- To connect the Holy Spirit's role as the Love of the Father and the Son with his role in drawing us into the communion of the Church, building up the Church, and sanctifying the Church
- To see in Blessed Stanley Rother the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work, especially fortitude
- To appreciate the Holy Spirit's ongoing work in the Church's teaching, sanctification, and evangelization

STEP 1: Begin

OPENING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit
and they shall be created.
And you shall renew the face of the earth.
Amen.

—*Prayer to the Holy Spirit*

INTRODUCTION

The mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is brought to completion in the Church, which is the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. This joint mission henceforth brings Christ's faithful to share in his communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit *prepares* men and goes out to them with his grace, in order to draw them to Christ. (CCC 737)

If Scripture is the story of God gradually revealing himself to man, then that story hits a high point at Pentecost, when the Holy Trinity is fully revealed in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles and Mary, inaugurating the age of the Church. In this age, the joint mission of Jesus and the Spirit is to draw all people into communion with God. So when we say that "the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is brought to completion in the Church," we don't mean the mission has stopped. Instead, it is ongoing—it is being continually completed as the Spirit sanctifies the Church, builds her up, and draws new members into her fellowship of faith.

How should we understand the Holy Spirit, who so often seems more obscure than the Father and the Son? How can we appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in our lives? And how can we grow in devotion to the Holy Spirit in particular, who resides in our hearts and prompts us toward Heaven?

In this session, we look to the mystery of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity. We reflect on the Spirit as the bond of love: between Father and Son, between the soul and the Trinity, and between all the members of Christ's Body, the Church. It is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us and unifies us with one another and with God in the communion of the Church.

STEP 2: Learn

SETTING THE STAGE

The Blessed Stanley Rother Shrine in Oklahoma City is a place to remember, to honor, and to celebrate the courageous witness of its namesake. Designed in the Spanish mission style, the church recalls the parish in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala, where Blessed Stanley Rother served and evangelized. It is a pilgrimage destination for those near and far, a place where reminders of the work of the Holy Spirit are present everywhere: in the church building, in the life of Blessed Stanley, and in the hearts of the many pilgrims who journey to this place of holiness and inspiration.

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Holy Trinity, the bond of love between the Father and the Son. As Love, the Holy Spirit unites, animates, and sanctifies the Church, enabling her to bring salvation to the world. This cannot happen without her members, so the Holy Spirit sanctifies each of us through God's grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But do we really know the Holy Spirit and all that the Spirit does? As we reflect on the mystery of the Holy Spirit, we will understand better not only who the Holy Spirit is and what he does, but also how we can become more aware of the Spirit's action in our lives.

Leader

The Triune God communicates himself to man in the Holy Spirit from the beginning through his “image and likeness.” Under the action of the same Spirit, man, and through him the created world, which has been redeemed by Christ, draw near to their ultimate destinies in God. The Church is “a sacrament, that is sign and instrument” of this coming together of the two poles of creation and redemption, God and man.

– Pope Saint John Paul II, *encyclical letter, Dominum et vivificantem (Lord and Giver of Life)*, no. 64

I. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, sanctifies and builds up the Church

II. Salvation History: The Holy Spirit in salvation history

- A. The Holy Spirit is present throughout the Old Testament
 - 1. The Spirit is the breath (Hebrew: *ruach*) of God, bringing life and renewal
 - 2. Wind, water, light, and oil are all symbols of the Holy Spirit
 - 3. Moses and Joel prophesy about a time when everyone will have access to the Spirit
- B. In the New Covenant, we see that the Holy Spirit is also about relationship, and love
 - 1. The Spirit enables us to pray, to draw near to God, and to be united in Christ
 - 2. This fulfills the bond between ancient Israelites, who were members of the same covenant family

III. Pilgrimage: Blessed Stanley Rother witnessed to the missionary impulse and courage of the Holy Spirit

- A. This young farm boy became a priest and a missionary in Guatemala
 - 1. He translated the New Testament into the language of the native peoples
 - 2. Placed on a government “death list,” he said: “The shepherd cannot run at the first sign of danger”
 - 3. He stayed close to his people and was martyred on July 28, 1981
- B. The Holy Spirit will grant each of us a variety of charisms and gifts
 - 1. Pope Francis has told priests to have the “smell of the sheep”
 - 2. Father Stanley lived the charism of fortitude by sharing life with the people he served

IV. Catechesis: The Holy Spirit—love and gift

- A. The third Person of the Trinity is the love and gift between the Father and the Son
- B. The giver of life gives life at creation, at the Incarnation, and through grace
- C. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes upon the Church, empowering her to sanctify herself and others through evangelization, teaching, sacraments, and the witnesses of martyrs
- D. The Holy Spirit continues to work in the Church and in our lives, uniting us with God and with one another

V. *Lectio divina*: Acts 2:1–13

- A. Pentecost begins the time of the Spirit, of the Church—we each have a part to play
- B. We have the Spirit within us, strengthening and enlightening us so that we can courageously enlighten others

WORD MEANING:

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Stable dispositions infused at Baptism that make a person readily follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Traditionally, seven gifts are identified: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

The perfection of a soul is measured by its docility to the movement of the Spirit, by the promptitude and fidelity with which its strings produce the divine notes of the song of love.

— Archbishop Luis M. Martinez, *The Sanctifier, I*, chap. 3

STEP 3: Engage

- 1) The story of Pentecost in Acts 2, with its image of tongues of fire resting on the apostles and Mary, is one of the most iconic in Scripture. The early Church saw in it a contrast with the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. What can the differences between these two stories teach us about the role of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and in our own lives?

One contrast that might be raised is that in one story, the many languages became an obstacle to understanding others, whereas in the other story, people were brought together because of their understanding of different languages through the working of the Holy Spirit. Related to this is a contrast between one people's division on account of language and the unity now of many peoples despite different languages. In both examples, the unifying role of the Holy Spirit becomes apparent. An additional difference is the attempt to build a city and make a name for oneself, versus receiving the Holy Spirit—the first involves our own striving, and the second is God's gift. The lesson here is one of being receptive and docile to the work of the Holy Spirit; not only that, it is the Holy Spirit who builds up the Church, the city of God, which is not a city constructed by human efforts. Finally, the story of Babel ends with the image of peoples scattered across the land; but the Pentecost account ends with conversion, Baptism, and a community gathered together in fellowship, prayer, sacrament, and service (Acts 2:41–47). The first image teaches us something about our state apart from Christ and his gift of the Holy Spirit; the second teaches about the role of the Holy Spirit in building up, sanctifying, and animating the Church and each of us as members. In these and other examples, a greater grasp of the Holy Spirit can be had, first in what we see the Spirit doing in Scripture and then in how this reflects the characteristics of the Holy Spirit as the third Person of the Trinity.

Leader

- 2) Blessed Stanley Rother's life clearly manifests fortitude as a Gift of the Holy Spirit (see Isa 11:2–3). But we also see counsel, or right judgment, in play: he obeys his bishop's call to return home in the face of threats on his life, but he convinces the bishop to let him return to the mission—and danger—in Guatemala. When you think about Blessed Stanley, other saints, or even your own life, where do you see the Gifts of the Holy Spirit at work? (Other Gifts of the Holy Spirit are: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.)

Leader

One of the key points to appreciate about the gifts of the Holy Spirit is that they have less to do with our agency and more to do with God's. This is because the gifts are dispositions that make us docile to God's prompting and direction. When someone acts through the gifts, it will often be undetectable because God simply prompts us to do the ordinary, to do it well, and to do it with great love. But we notice the gifts at work in moments where a kind of supernatural insight or instinct seems to be operating. With Blessed Stanley Rother or the saints, it might look like threading the needle and finding a solution to an "impossible" situation through *counsel* or *knowledge*; it might look like the *wisdom* of a remarkably deep and simple intuition about divine things, like who God is, his providence, or the life of prayer; it might look like *courage* in the face of extraordinary difficulty or danger; or it might look like a profound sense of God's greatness, a *fear of the Lord*, that makes sin powerfully abhorrent. We can't always determine precisely how much of the action is our part and how much is God's prompting, but the point is not to measure as much as it is to realize that we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit at Baptism and they are operative throughout our Christian lives, ideally growing in strength and influence as we mature in the Christian life. Jesus and the saints offer us the clearest picture of what this looks like.

- 3) As his name implies, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit who is holy but also who makes holy, both the Church and us. As we appreciate more and more the role of the Holy Spirit living within us, making us holy, and prompting us to action, what effects should our appreciation have in our lives? How can we get to know, love, and rely on the Holy Spirit more?

Leader

Many ideas could be raised here. Growing in familiarity with Scripture and especially how the Spirit is present in Scripture, from beginning to end, could be a good starting point for growing in knowledge and love of the Holy Spirit. Coming to know the saints, who are witnesses to the work of the Holy Spirit, can also help us to see how the Holy Spirit works and where in our lives he might be at work. Other ideas might include reflecting on our own lives in prayer or conversing with a holy friend or mentor about the action of the Spirit in his or her life. As we grow in awareness of the Holy Spirit's ways, we increasingly come to see how our own actions might be the result of a divine prompting. This should fill us with gratitude and humility, since we will see more clearly how the Lord comes to our aid, how the Spirit works within us, and how great our reliance on him and gratitude for him should be.

STEP 4: Conclude

In a striking phrase, the *Catechism* quotes the second-century Shepherd of Hermas: "The world was created for the sake of the Church" (CCC 760). After considering the Holy Spirit and his mission in this session, we can begin to understand this phrase better. The Church is, in fact, God's crowning achievement. He created the world to be the place where we can encounter him and be drawn into the communion of believers, united with God in Christ through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the very Love of God, who comes to dwell in our hearts to unite us with God and with one another. We are invited to rely ever more on the Holy Spirit and to allow him to move in our hearts to sanctify us and to draw us into the very heart of God.

CLOSING PRAYER

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
That my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
That my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
That I love but what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
To defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,
That I always may be holy.

— *Prayer to the Holy Spirit,*
Saint Augustine



MEMORY VERSE

If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. ... The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.

— GALATIANS 5:18, 22-23

CALL TO CONVERSION

The newness of life that Saint Paul writes about is something we all long for. But we cannot simply acquire it once and for all. Instead, we “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4), as Saint Paul tells us, and this journey requires our action and participation. Our action is a response to Christ’s saving action in the Paschal Mystery. He invites us into the newness of life that he won for us and empowers us to respond affirmatively, in both word and deed.

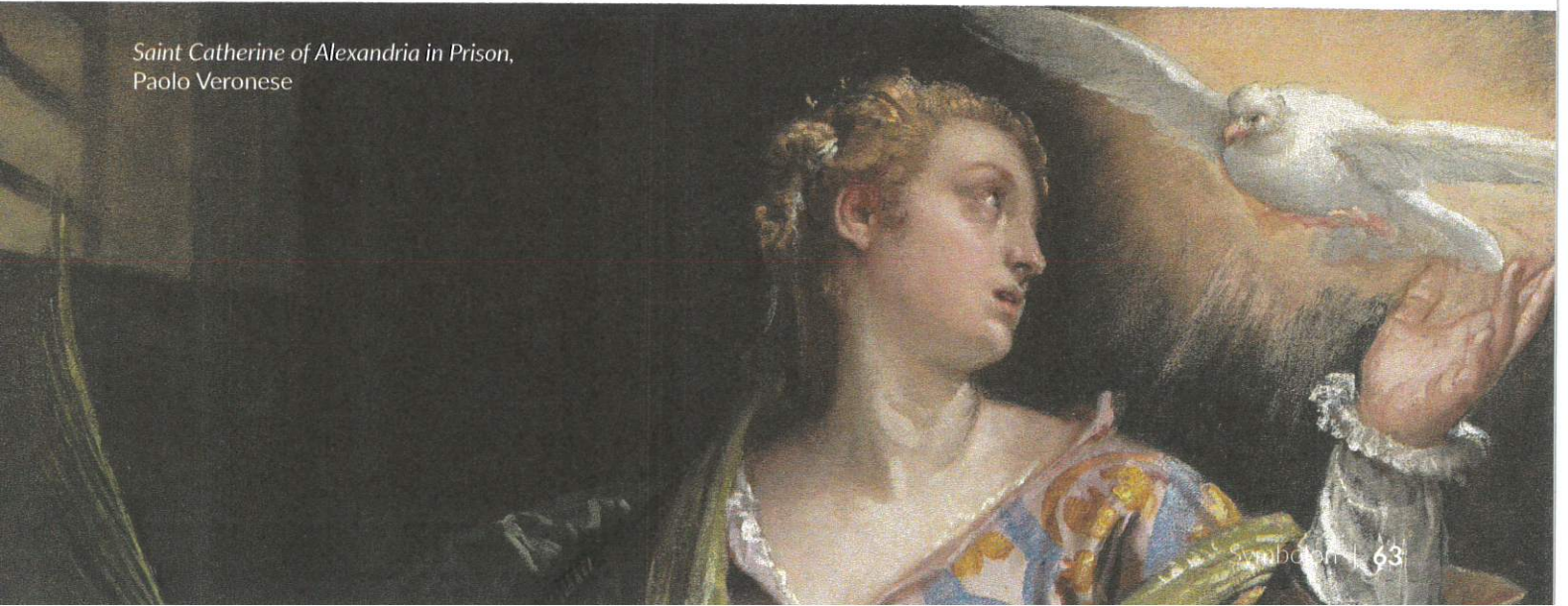
The Holy Spirit truly dwells and works within our souls. Beyond his very presence, he gives us a variety of helps so that we might cooperate with God’s plan, for our salvation and for the good of the Church. Two broad categories include the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and charisms.

Based on Isaiah 11:2–3, the Church’s tradition identifies seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. These gifts make our minds and hearts ready to follow the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit. As for charisms, Saint Paul lists some in 1 Corinthians 12: a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, healing, prophecy, tongues, etc. The list is not meant to be exhaustive; recently some have tried to identify more ordinary charisms, such as hospitality and administration. The point of charisms, whatever type they might be, is expressed well by Saint Paul just before he lists some of them: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:4, 7).

The main purpose of any help that the Holy Spirit gives is to build up the Church. The gifts do so primarily by building up the person in holiness, making him or her docile to the Lord’s will; charisms do that primarily by building up the Body of Christ, largely through service. The true test of our fidelity to the Spirit is how much we love the Church, the Body of Christ in the world.

Reflect on the work of the Holy Spirit in your life and on your devotion to the Holy Spirit. What Gifts of the Holy Spirit would you like the Lord to deepen and strengthen? What charisms might you possess, and what opportunities might invite you to strengthen these charisms? Bring these thoughts and reflections to the Lord to ask him to give you just what you need to love and serve him more, especially in his Body, the Church.

Saint Catherine of Alexandria in Prison,
Paolo Veronese



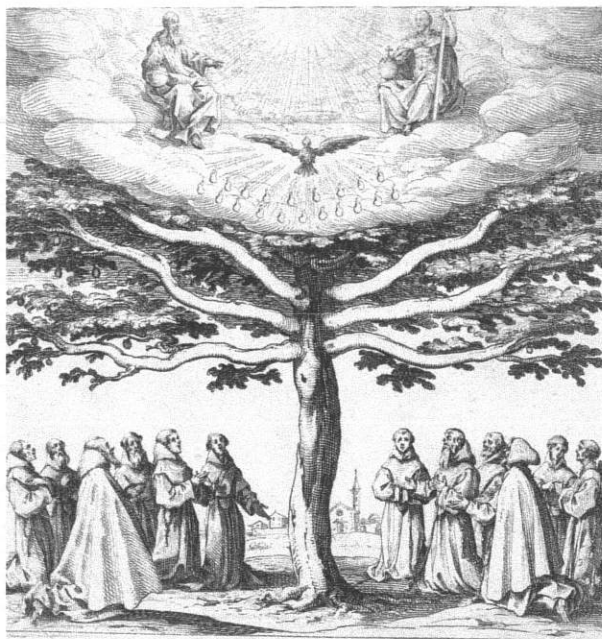
DIGGING DEEPER

The Holy Spirit has many names, including Paraclete, Comforter, Breath of God, and others. But as the name “Word” properly invokes the second Person of the Trinity, so “Love” properly applies to the third Person of the Trinity. Of course, the whole Trinity can be said to be Love, as when Saint John writes, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). But Love also comes to be seen as a personal name for the Holy Spirit. Why?

The main reason has to do with how we understand the Trinity. God is Spirit and, like us, he knows and loves—though in an infinitely greater way. God’s knowing of himself generates his Word, and his loving generates his Love—these are the second and third Persons of the Trinity.

But there is another reason as well, a beautiful one. The *Catechism* gets at this reason: “‘God is Love’ and love is his *first gift*, containing all others” (CCC 733, quoting 1 John 4:8, 16, emphasis added). Love is God’s first gift. Saint Thomas Aquinas points out that when we give a true gift, love is the motivation. In a way, the very first thing the giver gives is love, since without that love, no gift would follow. Love is always the first gift.

What’s the takeaway? God is generous. He gives us many, many things—but the very first gift, the gift that underlies all others, is himself, his Love, the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts (see Rom 5:5).



The Holy Trinity in the Tree of Life Adored by Franciscans, Jacques Callot

Without that gift, no other would be given; and without that gift, we would be unable to receive so many other gifts of God, because the grace of the Spirit tills the soil to receive the seeds of God’s supernatural gifts. No other gift of God compares to this gift of himself. So where do we focus most of our attention and gratitude, in life and in our prayer? We are right to thank God for the little things and for the big things. Do we also thank him for the biggest thing: the gift of himself, of his Holy Spirit, the first gift that motivates the giving of every other gift?

FOR FURTHER READING

John 14–16 and Romans 8

Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 683–750

Ronald Knox, *The Creed in Slow Motion*, chaps. 17–18

Pope Saint John Paul II, encyclical letter, *Dominum et vivificantem* (Lord and Giver of Life)

Luis M. Martinez, *The Sanctifier*