

catechesis

THE SPIRIT & THE BRIDE



POPE
FRANCIS

Pope Francis

CATECHESIS ON THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE

THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES THE PEOPLE OF GOD TOWARDS JESUS, OUR HOPE (2024)

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1. The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (29 May 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today, with this catechesis we begin a cycle of reflections with the theme ‘The Holy Spirit and the Bride’ – the bride is the Church – “The Holy Spirit guides God's people towards Jesus our hope’. We will make this journey through the three great stages of salvation history: the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the time of the Church. Always keeping our gaze fixed on Jesus, who is our hope.

In these first catecheses on the Spirit in the Old Testament, we will not do ‘biblical archaeology’. Instead, we will discover that what is given as a promise in the Old Testament has been fully realised in Christ. It will be like following the path of the sun from dawn to noon.

Let us begin with the first two verses of the entire Bible. The first two verses of the Bible read: ‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And *the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters*’ (*Gen 1:1-2*). The Spirit of God appears to us here as the mysterious power that moves the world from its initial formless, deserted, and gloomy state to its ordered and harmonious state. Because the Spirit makes harmony, harmony in life, harmony in the world. In other words, it is He who makes the world pass from chaos to the cosmos, that is, from confusion to something beautiful and ordered. This, in fact, is the meaning of the Greek word *kosmos*, as well as the Latin word *mundus*, that is, something beautiful, something ordered, clean, harmonious, because the Spirit is harmony.

This still vague hint of the Holy Spirit’s action in creation becomes more precise in the following revelation. In a psalm we read: ‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host’ (*Ps 33:6*); and again: ‘You send forth Your spirit, they are created, and You renew the face of the earth’ (*Ps 104:30*).

This line of development becomes very clear in the New Testament, which describes the intervention of the Holy Spirit in the new creation, using precisely the images that one reads about in connection with the origin of the world: the dove that hovers over the waters of the Jordan at Jesus’ baptism (cf. *Mt 3:16*); Jesus who, in the Upper Room, breathes on the disciples and says: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (*Jn 20:22*), just as in the beginning God breathed His breath on Adam (cf. *Gen 2:7*).

The Apostle Paul introduces a new element into this relationship between *the Holy Spirit and creation*. He speaks of a universe that ‘groans and suffers as in labour pains’ (cf. *Rom* 8:22). It suffers because of man who has subjected it to the ‘bondage of corruption’ (cf. vv. 20-21). It is a reality that concerns us closely and concerns us dramatically. The Apostle sees the cause of the suffering of creation in the corruption and sin of humanity that has dragged it into its alienation from God. This remains as true today as it was then. We see the havoc that has been done, and that continues to be wrought upon creation by humanity, especially that part of it that has greater capacity to exploit its resources.

St Francis of Assisi shows us a way out, a beautiful way, a way out to return to the harmony of the Spirit: the way of contemplation and praise. He wanted a canticle of praise to the Creator to be raised from the creatures. We recall, ‘Laudato sí, mi Signore...’ the canticle of Francis of Assisi.

One of the psalms (18:2 [19:1]) says, ‘*The heavens declare the glory of God*’, but men and women are needed to give voice to this mute cry of theirs. And in the ‘*Sanctus*’ of the Mass we repeat each time: ‘Heaven and earth are full of your glory.’ They are, so to speak, ‘pregnant’ with it, but they need the hands of a good midwife to give birth to this praise of theirs. Our vocation in the world, Paul again reminds us, is to be ‘*praise of His glory*’ (*Eph* 1:12). It is to put the joy of contemplating ahead of the joy of possessing. And no one has rejoiced in creatures more than Francis of Assisi, who did not want to possess any of them.

Brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit, Who in the beginning transformed chaos into cosmos, is at work to bring about this transformation in every person. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God promises: ‘I will give you a new heart, and a new Spirit I will put within you... I will put my Spirit within you’ (*Ez* 36:26-27). For our heart resembles that deserted, dark abyss of the first verses of Genesis. Opposed feelings and desires stir within it: those of the flesh and those of the spirit. We are all, in a sense, that ‘kingdom divided against itself’ that Jesus talks about in the Gospel (cf. *Mk* 3:24). Within ourselves we can say that there is an external chaos – social chaos, political chaos. We think about wars, we think about so many boys and girls who don’t have enough to eat, about so many social injustices. This is the external chaos. But there is also an internal chaos: internal to each of us. The former cannot be healed unless we begin to heal the latter! Brothers and sisters, let us do a good job of making our internal confusion a clarity of the Holy Spirit. It is the power of God that does this, and we open our hearts so that He can do it.

May this reflection arouse in us the desire to experience the Creator Spirit. For more than a millennium, the Church has put on our lips the cry to ask: ‘*Veni creator Spiritus!*’ ‘Come, O Creator Spirit! Visit our minds. Fill with heavenly grace the hearts you have created.’ Let us ask the Holy Spirit to come to us and make us new persons, with the newness of the Spirit. Thank you.

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2. Where there is the Spirit of God, there is freedom (5 June 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In today's catechesis, I would like to reflect with you on the name by which the Holy Spirit is called in the Bible.

The first thing we know of a person is the name. It is by his name that we address him, that we distinguish him, and remember him. The third Person of the Trinity also has a name: He is called the Holy Spirit. But “Spirit” is the Latinised version. The name of the Spirit, the one by which the first recipients of revelation knew Him, by which the prophets, the psalmists, Mary, Jesus, and the Apostles invoked Him, is *Ruach*, which means breath, wind, a puff of air.

In the Bible, the name is so important that it is almost identified with the person himself. To sanctify the name of God is to sanctify and honour God Himself. It is never a merely conventional designation: it always says something about the person, his origin, or his mission. This is also the case with the name *Ruach*. It contains the first fundamental revelation about the Person and function of the Holy Spirit.

It was by observing the wind and its manifestations that the biblical writers were led by God to discover a “wind” of a different nature. It is not by accident that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles accompanied by the ‘roar of a rushing wind’ (cf. Acts 2:2). It was as if the Holy Spirit wanted to put his signature on what was happening.

What, then, does His name, *Ruach*, tell us about the Holy Spirit? The image of the wind serves first of all to express the *power* of the Holy Spirit. “Spirit and power” or “power of the Spirit” is a recurring combination throughout the Bible. For the wind is an overwhelming force, an indomitable force, capable even of moving oceans.

Again, however, to discover the full meaning of the realities of the Bible, one must not stop at the Old Testament, but come to Jesus. Alongside power, Jesus will highlight another characteristic of the wind: its *freedom*. To Nicodemus, who visits Him at night, Jesus say solemnly: “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:8).

The wind is the only thing that absolutely cannot be bridled, cannot be “bottled up” or put in a box. We seek to “bottle up” the wind or put it in a box: it’s not

possible. It is free. To pretend to enclose the Holy Spirit in concepts, definitions, theses or treatises, as modern rationalism has sometimes attempted to do, is to lose it, nullify it, or reduce it to the purely human spirit, to a simple spirit. There is, however, a similar temptation in the ecclesiastical field, and it is that of wanting to enclose the Holy Spirit in canons, institutions, definitions. The Spirit creates and animates institutions, but He himself cannot be “institutionalised,” “objectified.” The wind blows “where it wills,” so the Spirit distributes its gifts “as it wills” (1 Cor 12:11).

St Paul will make this the fundamental law of Christian action. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17), he says. A free person, a free Christian, is the one who has the Spirit of the Lord. This is a very special freedom, quite different from what is commonly understood. It is not freedom to do what one wants, but the freedom to freely do what God wants! Not freedom to do good or evil, but freedom to do good and do it freely, that is, by attraction, not compulsion. In other words, the freedom of children, not slaves.

Saint Paul is well aware of the abuse or misunderstanding that can be made of this freedom. To the Galatians he writes, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as a pretext for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal 5:13). This is a freedom that expresses itself in what appears to be its opposite, it is expressed in service, and in service is true freedom.

We know well when this freedom becomes a “pretext for the flesh.” Paul gives an ever relevant list: “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these” (Gal 5:19-21). But so too is the freedom that allows the rich to exploit the poor, an ugly freedom that allows the strong to exploit the weak, and everyone to exploit the environment with impunity. And this is an ugly freedom, it is not the freedom of the Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, where do we draw this freedom of the Spirit, so contrary to the freedom of selfishness? The answer is in the words Jesus addressed one day to His listeners: “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). The freedom that Jesus gives us. Let us ask Jesus to make us, through His Holy Spirit, truly free men and women. Free to serve, in love and joy. Thank you.

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3. Knowing God's love through God's words (12 June 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning, welcome!

Let us continue the catechesis on the Holy Spirit who guides the Church towards Christ our hope. He is the guide. Last time we contemplated the work of the Spirit in creation; today we will see it in *revelation*, in which the *Sacred Scripture* is witness inspired by God and authoritative.

The Second Letter of Saint Paul to Timothy contains this statement: “*All Scripture is inspired by God*” (3:16). And another passage in the New Testament says: “*men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God*” (2 Pt 1:21). This is the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, which we proclaim as an article of faith in the Creed, when we say that the Holy Spirit “has spoken through the prophets”. The divine inspiration of the Bible.

The Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures, is also the one who explains and makes them perennially living and active. From *inspired*, he makes them *inspiring*. The Sacred Scriptures “as inspired by God”, says Vatican Council II, “and committed once and for all to writing ... impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles” (21). In this way the Holy Spirit continues, in the Church, the action of the Risen Jesus who, after Easter, “opened the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures” (cf. Lk 24:45).

Indeed, it can happen that in a certain passage of the Scripture, that we have read many times without particular emotion, one day we read it in an atmosphere of faith and prayer, and then that text is unexpectedly illuminated, it speaks to us, it sheds light on a problem we are living, it makes God’s will for us clear in a certain situation. To what is this change due, if not to an enlightenment of the Holy Spirit? The words of the Scripture, under the action of the Spirit, become luminous; and in those cases, we touch with our own hands how true is the statement in the Letter to the Hebrews: “*The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword*” (4:12).

Brothers and sisters, the Church is nourished by the spiritual reading of the Sacred Scripture, that is, by reading under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that inspired it. At its centre, like a beacon that illuminates everything, there is the event of the death and resurrection of Christ, which fulfils the plan of salvation, realizes all the figures and the prophecies, unveils all the hidden mysteries and offers the true key to reading the entire Bible. The death and resurrection of

Christ is the beacon that illuminates all the Bible, and it also illuminates our life. Revelation describes all of this with the image of the Lamb that breaks the seals of the book “written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals” (cf. 5:1-9), that is, the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The Church, Bride of Christ, is the authorized interpreter of the inspired text of the Scriptures; the Church is the mediator of its authentic proclamation. Since the Church is gifted with the Holy Spirit — this is why she is the interpreter — she is the “pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tm 3:15). Why? Because she is inspired, held steady by the Holy Spirit. And the task of the Church is to help the faithful and those who seek the truth to interpret the biblical texts correctly.

One way of doing a spiritual reading of the Word of God is what is called the *lectio divina*, a word whose meaning we perhaps do not understand. It consists in dedicating a time of the day to the personal and meditative reading of a passage of the Scripture. And this is very important: every day, take the time to listen to, to meditate, reading a passage from the Scripture. And therefore, I recommend that you always have a pocket edition of the Gospel and keep it in your bag, in your pocket... So, when you are travelling, or have a little free time, you can take it and read it. This is very important for life. Get a pocket Gospel and read it once, twice, or whenever you have the chance throughout the day. But the quintessential spiritual reading of the Scriptures is the community reading in the Liturgy at Mass. There, we see how an event or a teaching, given by the Old Testament, finds its full expression in the Gospel of Christ. And the homily, that comment by the celebrant, must help to transfer the Word of God from the book to life. But for this, the homily must be brief: an image, a thought and a sentiment. The homily must not go on for more than eight minutes, because after that time, attention is lost and the people fall asleep, and they are right. A homily should be like that. And I want to say this to priests, who talk a lot, very often, and one does not understand what they are talking about. A brief homily: a thought, a sentiment and a cue for action, for what to do. No more than eight minutes. Because the homily must help transfer the Word of God from the book to life. And among the many words of God that we listen to every day in Mass or in the Liturgy of the Hours, there is always one that is meant especially for us. Something that touches the heart. Welcomed into the heart, it can illuminate our day and inspire our prayer. It is a question of not letting it fall on deaf ears!

Let us conclude with a thought that can help us to fall in love with the Word of God. Like certain pieces of music, the Sacred Scripture too has a base note that accompanies it from the beginning to the end, and this note is the love of God. “The whole Bible”, observes Saint Augustine, “does nothing but tell of God’s love”. [1] And Saint Gregory the Great defines the Scriptures as “a letter from God Almighty to His creature”, like a letter from a bridegroom to the bride, and exhorts us to “learn and know the heart of God in the words of God”. [2] “Through this revelation”, says Vatican Council II again, “the invisible God, out of the abundance of His love, speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself” (*Dei Verbum*, 2).

Dear brothers and sisters, keep reading the Bible! But do not forget the pocket Gospel: carry it in your bag, in your pocket, and at some moment during the day, read a passage. And this will bring you very close to the Holy Spirit, who is in the Word of God. May the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures and now breathes

from them, help us to grasp this love of God in the concrete situations of life.
Thank you.

[1] *De catechizandis rudibus*, I, 8, 4: *PL* 40, 319.

[2] *Registrum Epistolarum*, V, 46 (ed. Ewald-Hartmann, pp. 345-346).

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4. The Psalms, symphony of prayer in the Bible (19 June 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In preparation for the next Jubilee, I invited the devotion of the year 2024 “to a great ‘symphony’ of prayer.”^[1] With today’s catechesis, I would like to recall that the Church already possesses a symphony of prayer, whose composer is the Holy Spirit, and it is the Book of Psalms.

As in any symphony, it contains various “movements,” that is, various genres of prayer: praise, thanksgiving, supplication, lamentation, narration, sapiential reflection, and others, both in the personal form and in the choral form of the whole people. These are the songs that the Spirit himself has placed on the lips of the Bride, His Church. All the Books of the Bible, I mentioned last time, are inspired by the Holy Spirit, but the Book of Psalms is also so in the sense that it is full of poetic inspiration.

The Psalms have had a special place in the New Testament. Indeed, there were and still are editions that contain the New Testament and the Psalms together. On my desk I have an edition in Ukrainian of this New Testament of Psalms from a soldier who died in the war, that was sent to me. And he prayed on the front with this book. Not all the Psalms – and not all of every Psalm – can be repeated and made their own by Christians and even less by modern man. They reflect, at times, a historical situation and a religious mentality that are no longer our own. This does not mean that they are not inspired, but in certain aspects they are linked to a time and a temporary stage of revelation, as is also the case with a large part of ancient legislation.

What most commends the Psalms to our attention is that they were the prayer of Jesus, Mary, the Apostles and all the Christian generations that have preceded us. When we recite them, God listens to them with that grandiose “orchestration” that is the community of saints. Jesus, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, enters into the world with a verse from a Psalm in His heart: “Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God” (cf. *Heb* 10:7; *Ps* 40:9), and He leaves the world, according to the Gospel of Luke, with another verse on His lips: “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit” (*Lk* 23:46, cf. *Ps* 31:6).

The use of psalms in the New Testament is followed by that of the Fathers and the entire Church, which makes them a fixed element in the celebration of the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. “All the Sacred Scripture breathes the goodness of God,” says Saint Ambrose, “but in particular the sweet book of the Psalms,”^[2] the

sweet book of the Psalms. I wonder: do you pray with the Psalms sometimes? Take the Bible or the New Testament, and pray a Psalm. For example, when you are a bit sad for having sinned, do you pray Psalm 50? There are many Psalms that help us keep going. Form the habit of praying with the Psalms. I assure you that you would be happy in the end.

But we cannot only live on the legacy of the past: it is necessary to make the Psalms *our* prayer. It was written that, in a certain sense, we must ourselves become the “scribes” of the Psalms, making them ours and praying with them.^[3] If there are Psalms, or just verses, that speak to our heart, it is good to repeat them and pray them during the day. The Psalms are prayers “for all seasons:” there is no state of mind or need that does not find in them the best words to be transformed into prayer. Unlike other prayers, the Psalms do not lose their effectiveness by dint of being repeated; on the contrary, they increase it. Why? Because they are inspired by God and “breathe” God, every time they are read with faith.

If we feel oppressed by remorse or guilt, because we are sinners, we can repeat with David: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love” (Ps 51:1), Psalm 51. If we want to express a strong personal bond with love, let us say: “O God, thou art my God / I seek thee, / my soul thirsts for thee; / my flesh faints for thee, / as in a dry and weary land where no water is” (Ps 63:1), Psalm 63. It is not for nothing that the Liturgy has inserted this Psalm in the Lauds of Sunday and the solemnities. And if fear and anguish assail us, those wonderful words of Psalm 23 come to our rescue: “The Lord is my shepherd ... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, / I fear no evil” (Ps 23:1,4).

The Psalms allow us not to impoverish our prayer by reducing it merely to requests, to a continuous “give me, give us...” We learn from the Lord’s Prayer, which before asking for our “daily bread,” says, “Hallowed by thy name; thy Kingdom come, thy will be done.. The Psalms help us to open ourselves to a prayer that is less focused on ourselves: a prayer of praise, of blessing, of thanksgiving; and they also help us give voice to all creation, involving it in our praise.

Brothers and sisters, may the Holy Spirit, who gave the Church Bride the words to pray to her divine Bridegroom, help us to make them resound in the Church today, and to make this year of preparation for the Jubilee a true symphony of prayer. Thank you!

[1] *Letter to Archbishop Fisichella for the Jubilee 2025* (11 February 2022).

[2] *Comment on the Psalms* I, 4, 7: CSEL 64,4-7.

[3] Giovanni Cassiano, *Conlationes*, X,11: SCh 54, 92-93.

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5. Incarnate by the work of the Holy Spirit (7 August 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

With today's catechesis, we enter into the second phase of salvation history. After contemplating the Holy Spirit in the work of Creation, we will contemplate it for a few weeks in the work of Redemption, namely of Jesus Christ. So, let us move on to the New Testament, and see the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

Today's theme is the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation of the Word. In the Gospel of Luke, we read: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you*" — to Mary — "*and the power of the Most High will overshadow you*" (1:35). The evangelist Matthew confirms this fundamental fact that regards Mary and the Holy Spirit, saying that Mary "*was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit*" (1:18).

The Church took up this revealed fact and very soon positioned it at the heart of her Symbol of faith. In the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, in 381 — which defined the divinity of the Holy Spirit — this article enters into the formula of the "Creed", the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, which we recite in every Mass. It states that the Son of God "by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man".

It is therefore an *ecumenical* fact of faith, because all Christians profess together that same Symbol of faith. Catholic piety, since time immemorial, has drawn from it one of its daily prayers, the Angelus.

This article of faith is the foundation that enables us to speak of Mary as the quintessential *Bride*, who is a *figure of the Church*. Indeed, Jesus, as Saint Leo the Great writes, "born of a virgin mother by the action of the Holy Spirit, Christ keeps his Church spotless and makes her fruitful by the inspiration of the same Spirit" (12th Sermon on the Passion, 3, 6: PL 54, 356). This parallelism is taken up in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II, which says: "By her belief and obedience, [Mary] brought forth on earth the very Son of the Father, showing an undefiled faith, not in the word of the ancient serpent, but in that of God's messenger... The Church indeed, contemplating her hidden sanctity, imitating her charity and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will, by receiving the Word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By her preaching she brings forth to a new and immortal life the sons who are born to her in baptism, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God" (no. 63-64).

Let us conclude with a practical reflection for our life, suggested by the Scripture's insistence on the verbs "to conceive" and "to bear". In the prophecy of Isaiah we hear: "*Behold a young woman shall conceive and bear a son*" (7:14), and the Angel says to Mary, "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son" (*Lk* 1:31). Mary first conceived, then bore Jesus: first she welcomed him into herself, in her heart and her flesh, then she gave birth to him.

This happens also for the Church: first she welcomes the Word of God, letting it "speak tenderly to her" (cf. *Hos* 2:14), and "fill [her] stomach" (cf. *Ez* 3:3), in accordance with two Bible expressions, and then she gives birth to it with her life and preaching. The second operation is sterile without the first.

"How shall this be, since I have no husband?", Mary asks and the angel answers, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" (*Lk* 1:34-35). When she is faced with tasks beyond her strength, the Church spontaneously asks the same question: "How is this possible?". How is it possible to proclaim Jesus Christ and his salvation to a world that seems to seek only well-being, in this world? The answer is also the same as then: "*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you*"... "and you shall be my witnesses" (*Acts* 1:8). This is what Jesus told the Apostles after he had risen, using almost the same identical words. Without the Holy Spirit, the Church cannot move forward, the Church does not grow, the Church cannot preach.

What is said about the Church in general also applies to us, to every baptized person. All of us sometimes find ourselves, in life, in situations beyond our strength and ask ourselves: "How can I cope with this situation?". It helps, in such cases, to remember and repeat to ourselves what the angel said to the Virgin: "*With God nothing will be impossible*" (*Lk* 1:37).

Brothers and sisters, let us too always resume our journey, with this comforting certainty in our hearts: "With God nothing will be impossible". And if we believe this, we will perform miracles. With God nothing will be impossible. Thank you.

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6. The Holy Spirit in the Baptism of Jesus (21 August 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we reflect on the Holy Spirit who descends upon Jesus at the baptism in the Jordan, and spreads from Him into His body, which is the Church. In the Gospel of Mark, the scene of Jesus' baptism is described thus: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased'" (Mk 1:9-11).

The entire Trinity met at that moment, on the banks of the Jordan! There is the Father, who is present with his voice; there is the Holy Spirit, who descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove; and there is he whom the Father proclaims to be his beloved Son, Jesus. It is a very important moment of Revelation, it is an important moment of salvation history. It will be good for us to reread this Gospel passage.

What happened that was so important at Jesus' baptism that led all the Evangelists to recount it? We find the answer in the words Jesus utters, shortly afterwards, in the synagogue of Nazareth, clearly referring to the event in the Jordan: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me*" (Lk 4:18).

In the Jordan, God the Father "anointed with the Holy Spirit"; that is, he consecrated Jesus as King, Prophet and Priest. Indeed, in the Old Testament, kings, prophets and priests were anointed with perfumed oil. In the case of Christ, instead of physical oil, there is the spiritual oil that is the Holy Spirit; instead of the symbol there is the reality: there is the Spirit himself who descends upon Jesus.

Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit ever since the first moment of his Incarnation. However, this was a "personal grace", incommunicable; now, instead, with this *anointment*, he receives the fullness of the gift of the Spirit, but for his mission which, as the head, he will communicate to his body, which is the Church, and to every one of us. This is why the Church is the new "regal people, prophetic people, and priestly people". The Hebrew term "Messiah" and the corresponding Greek "Christ" — *Christós*, both referring to Jesus, mean "anointed". He was anointed with the oil of joy, anointed with the Holy Spirit. Our very name of "Christians" was explained by the Fathers in the literal sense: "Christian" means "anointed in imitation of Christ" (cf. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catechesis*, III, 1).

There is a Psalm in the Bible that speaks of a perfumed oil, poured on the head of the high priest Aaron, and which descends to the hem of his robe (cf. *Ps 133:2*). This poetic image of the descending oil, used to describe the happiness of living together as brothers, has become a spiritual reality and a mystical reality in Christ and in the Church. Christ is the head, our High Priest, the Holy Spirit is the perfumed oil, and the Church is the body of Christ in which it spreads.

We have seen why the Holy Spirit, in the Bible, is symbolized by wind and, indeed, takes its very name, *Ruah* — wind — from it. It is also worth asking ourselves why it is symbolized by oil, and what practical lesson we can draw from this symbol. During Holy Thursday Mass, consecrating the oil known as “Chrism”, the bishop, referring to those who will receive the anointing in Baptism and Confirmation, says: “May those formed into a temple of your majesty by the holiness infused through this anointing and by the cleansing of the stain of their first birth be made fragrant with the innocence of a life pleasing to you”. This rite dates back to Saint Paul, who writes to the Corinthians: “For we are the aroma of Christ to God” (*2 Cor 2:15*). Anointment perfumes us, and a person who lives his anointment with joy makes the Church fragrant, makes the community fragrant, makes the family fragrant with this spiritual scent.

We know that, unfortunately, sometimes Christians do not spread the fragrance of Christ, but the bad odour of their own sin. And let us never forget: sin distances us from Jesus, sin makes us become bad oil. And the devil — let us not forget this — the devil usually enters via the pockets. Beware, beware. However, this must not distract us from the commitment to fulfil, as far as we are able and each in their own environment, this sublime vocation of being the good fragrance of Christ in the world. The fragrance of Christ emanates from the “fruits of the Spirit”, which are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (*Gal 5:22*). Paul said this, and how good it is to find a person who has these virtues: a loving person, a joyful person, a person who makes peace, a magnanimous person, not stingy, a benevolent person who welcomes everyone, a good person. It is beautiful to find a good person, a faithful person, a meek person, who is not proud... If we cultivate these fruits, and encounter these people, without us realizing it, someone will smell some of the fragrance of the Spirit of Christ around us. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to make us more aware that we are anointed, anointed by him.

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7. The Holy Spirit, our ally in the fight against the spirit of evil (25 September 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Immediately after His baptism in the Jordan, Jesus “*was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil*” (Mt 4:1) – this is what the Gospel of Matthew says. The initiative is not Satan’s, but God’s. Going into the wilderness, Jesus obeys an inspiration of the Holy Spirit; He does not fall into an enemy snare, no, no! Once He has withstood the test, it is written, He returns to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit” (Lk 4:14).

In the wilderness, Jesus freed Himself *of* Satan, and now He can deliver *from* Satan. He freed Himself, He frees from Satan. It is what the Evangelists highlight with the numerous studies of deliverance from possession. Jesus says to His opponents: “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Mt 12:28). And Jesus casts out the demons, with the aspiration of the kingdom of God.

Nowadays we are witnessing a strange phenomenon regarding the devil. At a certain cultural level, it is held that he simply does not exist. He would be a symbol of the collective subconscious, or alienation; in short, a metaphor. But “the cleverest ruse of the devil is to persuade you he does not exist!”, as someone wrote (Charles Baudelaire). He is astute: he makes us believe that he does not exist, and in this way he dominates everything. He is cunning. And yet our technological and secularized world is teeming with magicians, occultism, spiritualism, astrologers, sellers of spells and amulets, and unfortunately with real satanic sects. Driven out the door, the devil has re-entered, one might say, through the window. Driven out of faith, he re-enters with superstition. And if you are superstitious, you are unconsciously conversing with the devil. One does not converse with the devil.

The strongest proof of the existence of Satan is found not in sinners or the possessed, but in the saints! “And how can this be, Father?” Yes, it is true that the devil is present and working in certain extreme and “inhuman” forms of evil and wickedness that we see around us. But by this route, though, it is practically impossible to reach, in individual cases, the certainty that it is truly him, given that we cannot know with precision where his action ends and our own evil begins. This is why the Church is so prudent and so rigorous in performing exorcism, unlike what happens, unfortunately, in certain films!

It is in the life of the saints, precisely there, that the devil is forced to come out into the open, to place himself “against the light.” All the saints, all the great believers, some more, some less, testify to their struggle with this obscure reality, and one cannot honestly assume that they were all deluded or mere victims of the prejudices of their time.

The battle against the spirit of evil is won as Jesus won it in the wilderness: by striking with the word of God. You see that Jesus does not converse with the devil, He never conversed with the devil. Either he casts him out, or condemns him, but He never converses. And in the wilderness, he replies not with His word, but with the Word of God. Brothers, sisters, never converse with the devil; when temptations present themselves: “But, this would be nice, that would be nice” – stop. Raise your heart to the Lord, pray to Our Lady and banish him, just as Jesus taught us how to banish him. Saint Peter also suggests another means, that Jesus did not need, but we do – vigilance. “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pt 5:8). And Saint Paul says to us: “Give no opportunity to the devil” (Eph 4:27).

After Christ, on the cross, defeated forever the power of the “ruler of this world” (Jn 12:31), a Father of the Church said, “the devil is bound, like a dog on a chain; he cannot bite anyone except those who, defying the danger, go near him... He can bark, he can urge, but he can bite only those who want” [1]. If you are a fool and you go to the devil and say, “Ah, how are you?”, and everything, it ruins you. The devil – distance. One does not converse with the devil. One banishes him. Distance. And all of us, everyone, we have experience of how the devil approaches with some temptation. The temptation of the ten commandments: when we feel this, stop, keep your distance: do not approach the chained dog.

Modern technology, for example, besides the many positive resources that are to be appreciated, offers also countless means to “give an opportunity to the devil”, and many fall in the trap. Think of online pornography, behind which there is a flourishing market: we all know this. It is the devil at work, there. And this is a very widespread phenomenon, which Christians should beware of and strongly reject. Because any smartphone has access to this brutality, to this language of the devil: online pornography.

Awareness of the action of the devil in history should not discourage us. The final thought must be, also in this case, of trust and security: “I am with the Lord, be gone”. Christ overcame the devil and gave us the Holy Spirit to make His victory our own. The very action of the enemy can turn to our advantage, if with God's help we make it serve our purification. Let us therefore ask the Holy Spirit, in the words of the hymn *Veni Creator*:

Drive far away our wily Foe,
And Thine abiding peace bestow;
If Thou be our protecting Guide,
No evil can our steps betide”.

Beware, the devil is astute – but we Christians, with God's grace, are more astute than him. Thank you.

[1] Saint Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons* 121, 6: CC 103, p. 507.

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8. The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles (9 October 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In our itinerary of catechesis on the Holy Spirit and the Church, today we will refer to the Book of the Acts of the Apostles.

The account of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost begins with a description of some preparatory signs – the rush of wind and the tongues of fire – but finds its conclusion in the affirmation that “*they were all filled with the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:4). Saint Luke – who wrote the Acts of the Apostles – emphasizes that the Holy Spirit is He who ensures the *universality* and *unity* of the Church. The immediate effect of being “filled with the Holy Spirit” is that the Apostles “began to speak in other tongues,” and came out of the Upper Room to proclaim Jesus Christ to the crowd (cf. Acts 2:4 ff.).

In so doing, Luke wished to highlight the universal mission of the Church, as a sign of a new unity between all peoples. We see the Spirit work for unity in two ways. On the one hand, He drives the Church outwards, so that she can welcome an ever-greater number of people and peoples; on the other hand, she gathers them within to consolidate the unity achieved. He teaches her to expand in universality, and consolidate in unity. Universal and one: this is the mystery of the Church.

We see the first of the two movements – universality – in process in Chapter 10 of the *Acts*, in the episode of the conversion of Cornelius. On the day of Pentecost, the Apostles had proclaimed Christ to all the Jews and observers of the Mosaic law, whatever people they belonged to. It takes another “Pentecost,” very similar to the first, in the house of the centurion Cornelius, to induce the Apostles to expand their horizon and break down the last barrier, the one between Jews and pagans (cf. Acts 10-11).

This ethnical expansion is accompanied by a geographical one. Paul – we read again in the *Acts of the Apostles* (cf. 16:6-10) – wanted to proclaim the Gospel in a new region of Asia Minor; but it is written that they had been “forbidden by the Holy Spirit;” he attempted to enter Bithyn’ia, “but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.” We immediately discover the reason for these surprising prohibitions of the Spirit: the following night the Apostle received in a dream the order to pass into Macedonia. The Gospel thus left its native Asia and entered into Europe.

The second movement of the Holy Spirit – that which creates unity – is seen in action in Chapter 15 of the *Acts*, in the proceedings of the so-called Council of Jerusalem. The problem is how to ensure that the universality achieved does not compromise the unity of the Church. The Holy Spirit does not always create unity suddenly, with miraculous and decisive actions, as at Pentecost. He also does so – and in the majority of cases – with discreet work, respecting human time and differences, passing through people and institutions, prayer and confrontation. In, we would say today, a synodal manner. Indeed, this is what happens at the Council of Jerusalem, regarding the matter of the obligations of the Mosaic Law to be imposed on those who converted from paganism. The solution was announced to the entire Church, with the well-known words: “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” (*Acts* 15:28).

Saint Augustine explains the unity achieved by the Holy Spirit with an image, which has become classic: “How the soul is of the body of man is the holy Spirit of the body of Christ, which is the Church” (*Sermons*, 267, 4). The image helps us to understand something important. The Holy Spirit does not create the unity of the Church from the outside; He does not limit Himself to commanding us to be united. He Himself is the “bond of unity.” It is He who creates the unity of the Church.

As always, we will conclude with a thought that helps us to pass from the Church as a whole to each one of us. The unity of the Church is the unity between people and is not achieved on the drawing board, but in life. It is implemented in life. We all want unity, we all desire it from the depths of our heart; and yet it is so difficult to attain that, even within marriage and the family, union and concord are among the most difficult things to achieve and even harder to maintain.

The reason why unity among us is difficult is that, yes, everyone wants unity, but based on one’s own point of view, without considering that the other person in front of him thinks exactly the same thing about his “own” point of view. In this way, unity becomes even more elusive. The unity life, the unity of Pentecost, according to the Spirit, is achieved when one makes the effort to put God, not oneself, at the centre. Christian unity is built in this way too: not waiting for others to reach us where we are, but moving together towards Christ.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us be instruments of unity and peace.

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9. The Holy Spirit in the faith of the Church (16 October 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

With today's catechesis, we will move on from what the Holy Spirit revealed to us in the Holy Scripture to how He is present and active in the life of the Church, in our Christian life.

In the first three centuries, the Church did not feel the need to give an explicit formulation of her faith in the Holy Spirit. For example, in the Church's most ancient Creed, the so-called Symbol of the Apostles, after proclaiming: "I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was born, died, descended into hell, rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven," adds: "I believe in the Holy Spirit" and nothing more, without any specification.

But it was heresy that drove the Church to define this faith. When this process began – with Saint Athanasius in the fourth century – it was precisely the experience she had of the sanctifying and divinizing action of the Holy Spirit that led the Church to the certainty of the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. This occurred during the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381, which defined the divinity of the Holy Spirit with the well-known words we still repeat today in the Creed: "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."

To say that the Holy Spirit "is the Lord" was like saying that He shares the "Lordship" of God, that He belongs to the world of the Creator, not to that of creatures. The strongest affirmation is that He is due the same glory and adoration as the Father and the Son. It is the argument of equality in honour, dear to Saint Basil the Great, who was the main architect of that formula: the Holy Spirit is the Lord, He is God.

The Council definition was not a point of arrival, but of departure. And indeed, once the historical reasons that had obstructed a more explicit affirmation of the divinity of the Holy Spirit had been overcome, this was confidently proclaimed in the worship of the Church and in her theology. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, in the aftermath of the Council, went on to state without hesitation: "Is the Holy Spirit then God? Certainly! Is He consubstantial? Yes, if He is true God" (*Oratio* 31, 5.10).

What does the article of faith we proclaim every Sunday at Mass say to us, believers of today: “I believe in the Holy Spirit”? In the past, it was mainly concerned with the statement that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father.” The Latin Church soon supplemented this statement by adding, in the Creed of the Mass, that the Holy Spirit proceeds “also from the Son.” Since in Latin the expression “and from the Son” is called ‘*Filioque*,’ this gave rise to the dispute known by this name, which has been the reason (or pretext) for so many disputes and divisions between the Church of the East and the Church of the West. It is certainly not the case to address the issue here, which, moreover, in the climate of dialogue established between the two Churches, has lost the acrimony of the past and today allows us to hope for full mutual acceptance, as one of the main “reconciled differences.” I like to say this: “reconciled differences.” Among Christians there are many differences: he belongs to this school, that other one; this person is a Protestant, that person... The important thing is that these differences are reconciled, in the love of walking together.

Having overcome this obstacle, today we can value the most important prerogative for us that is proclaimed in the article of the Creed, namely that the Holy Spirit is “life-giving,” the “giver of life.” Let us ask ourselves: what life does the Holy Spirit give? At the beginning, in creation, the breath of God gives Adam natural life; the statue of mud is made “a living being” (cf. *Gen 2:7*). Now, in the new creation, the Holy Spirit is He who gives believers new life, the life of Christ, supernatural life, as children of God. Paul can exclaim: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death” (*Rom 8:2*).

In all of this, where is the great and consoling news for us? It is that the life given to us by the Holy Spirit is eternal life! Faith frees us from the horror of having to admit that everything ends here, that there is no redemption for the suffering and injustice that reign sovereign on earth. Another of the Apostle’s words assures us of this: “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” (*Rom 8:11*). The Spirit dwells in us, He is within us.

Let us cultivate this faith also for those who, often through no fault of their own, are deprived of it and are unable to give meaning to life. And let us not forget to thank Him, who with His death, obtained this inestimable gift for us!

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10. The Holy Spirit and the sacrament of marriage (23 October 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Last time we explained what we proclaim about the Holy Spirit in the Creed. The reflection of the Church, however, did not stop at that brief profession of faith. It continued, both in the East and in the West, by the work of the great Fathers and Doctors. Today, in particular, we would like to gather a few crumbs of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit developed in the Latin tradition, to see how it enlightens all of Christian life and the sacrament of marriage in particular.

The main originator of this doctrine is Saint Augustine, who developed the doctrine on the Holy Spirit. He sets out from the revelation that “God is love” (*1 Jn* 4:8). Now love presupposes one who loves, one who is beloved, and love itself that unites them. In the Trinity, the Father is He who loves, the source and origin of everything; the Son is He who is beloved, and the Holy Spirit is the love that unites them.^[1] The God of Christians is therefore a “sole” God, but not solitary; His is a unity of communion and love. Along these lines, some have proposed to call the Holy Spirit not the “third-person singular” of the Trinity, but rather the “first-person plural.” In other words, He is the We, the divine We of the Father and the Son, the bond of unity between different persons,^[2] the very principle of the unity of the Church, which is indeed a “sole body” resulting from several persons.

As I said, today I would like to reflect with you in particular on what the Holy Spirit has to say about the family. What can the Holy Spirit have to do with marriage, for example? A great deal, perhaps the essential, and I will try to explain why! Christian marriage is the sacrament of self-giving, one for the other, of man and woman. This is how the Creator intended it when he “So God created man in his own image ... male and female he created them” (*Gen* 1:27). The human couple is therefore the first and most elementary realization of the communion of love that is the Trinity.

Married couples, too, should form a first-person plural, a “we.” Stand before each other as an “I” and a “you,” and stand before the rest of the world, including the children, as a “we.” How beautiful it is to hear a mother say to her children: “Your father and I...,” as Mary said to Jesus when they found him at the age of twelve in the temple, teaching the Doctors (cf. *Lk* 2:48), and to hear a father say: “Your mother and I,” as if they were one. How much children need this unity— mother and father together – unity of parents, and how much they suffer when it is lacking! How much the children of separated parents suffer, how much they suffer.

However, to correspond to this vocation, marriage needs the support of He who is the Gift, indeed the quintessential giver. Where the Holy Spirit enters, the capacity for self-giving is reborn. Some Fathers of the Latin Church affirmed that, as the reciprocal gift of the Father and the Son in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is also the reason for the joy that reigns between them, and they were not afraid, when speaking about it, to use the image of gestures proper to married life, such as the kiss and the embrace.^[3]

No one says that such unity is an easy task, least of all in today's world; but this is the truth of things as the Creator designed them, and it is therefore in their nature. Certainly, it may seem easier and quicker to build on sand than on rock; but Jesus tells us what the result is (cf. *Mt* 7:24-27). In this case, then, we do not even need the parable, because the consequences of marriages built on sand are, unfortunately, there for all to see, and it is mainly the children who pay the price. Children suffer from the separation or the lack of love of the parents! With regard to so many couples, one must repeat what Mary said to Jesus, at Cana in Galilee: "They have no wine" (*Jn* 2:3). The Holy Spirit is He who continues to perform, on a spiritual level, the miracle that Jesus worked on that occasion; namely, to change the water of habit into a new joy of being together. It is not a pious illusion: it is what the Holy Spirit has done in so many marriages, when the spouses decided to invoke Him.

It would not be a bad thing, therefore, if alongside the information of a legal, psychological and moral nature that is given in the preparation of engaged couples for marriage, we were to deepen this "spiritual" preparation, the Holy Spirit who makes unity. An Italian proverb says, "Never place a finger, never intervene, between husband and wife." There is in fact a "finger" to be placed between husband and wife, the "finger of God:" that is, the Holy Spirit!

[1] Cfr. St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII,10,14

[2] Cfr. H. Mühlen, *Una mystica persona. La Chiesa come il mistero dello Spirito Santo*, Città Nuova, 1968.

[3] Cfr. S. Ilario di Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, II,1; St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI, 10,11.

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11. Confirmation, sacrament of the Holy Spirit (30 October 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we will continue our reflection on the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church through the Sacraments.

The sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit reaches us primarily through two channels: the *Word of God* and the *Sacraments*. And among all the Sacraments, there is one that is quintessentially the Sacrament of the Holy Spirit, and it is on this that I would like to focus today. It is the Sacrament of Confirmation.

In the New Testament, beyond baptism with water, another rite is mentioned, that of the *imposition of hands*, which has the purpose of communicating the Holy Spirit visibly and in a charismatic way, with effects analogous to those produced by the Apostles at Pentecost. The Acts of the Apostles refer to a significant episode in this regard. Having heard that some in Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John there from Jerusalem. They “went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit” (8:14-17).

Added to this is what Saint Paul writes in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: “The one who gives us security with you in Christ and who anointed us is God; He has also put His seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment” (1:21-22); the guarantee of the Spirit. The theme of the Holy Spirit as a “royal seal” with which Christ marks his sheep is at the basis of the doctrine of the “indelible character” conferred by this rite.

With the passing of time, the rite of anointing took shape as a Sacrament in itself, assuming diverse forms and content in the various ages and different rites of the Church. This is not the place to retrace this very complex history. What the Sacrament of Confirmation is in the understanding of the Church seems to me to be described in a very simple and clear way by the Catechism of adults of the Italian Episcopal Conference. It says: “Confirmation is for all the faithful what Pentecost was for the entire Church. ... It reinforces the baptismal incorporation into Christ and the Church and the consecration to the prophetic, royal and priestly mission. It communicates the abundance of the gifts of the Spirit. ... If, therefore, Baptism is the Sacrament of birth, Confirmation is the Sacrament of growth. For this very reason it is also the Sacrament of witness, because this is

closely linked to the maturity of Christian existence” (*La verità vi farà liberi*, Catechismo degli adulti, Vatican Publishing House 1995, pg. 324).

The problem is how to ensure that the Sacrament of Confirmation is not reduced, in practice, to “last rites,” that is the Sacrament of “departure” from the Church. It is said that it is the *farewell Sacrament*, because once young people do it they go away and then return for marriage. This is what people say... but we must ensure that it is rather the Sacrament of participation, of active participation in the life of the Church. It is a milestone that can seem impossible, given the current situation throughout the Church, but this does not mean that we should stop pursuing it. It will not be so for all Confirmands, children or adults, but it is important that it is at least for some who will then go on to be the animators of the community.

It can be useful, for this purpose, to be helped in preparing for the Sacrament by lay faithful who have had a personal encounter with Christ and have had a true experience of the Spirit. Some people say that they have experienced it as a blossoming of the Sacrament of Confirmation received as children.

But this does not relate only to future Confirmands; it relates to all of us and at any time. Together with *Confirmation* and *anointing*, we have received, the Apostle assures us, also the *bond* of the Spirit, which elsewhere he calls “the first fruits of the Spirit” (*Rm 8:23*). We must “spend” this bond, savour these first fruits, not bury underground the charisms and talents received.

Saint Paul exhorted the disciple Timothy to “stir into flame the gift of God* that you have through the imposition of my hands” (*2 Tim 1:6*), and the verb used suggests the image of one who breathes on the fire to revive the flame. Here is a good goal for the Jubilee year! To remove the ashes of habit and disengagement, to become, like the torchbearers at the Olympics, bearers of the flame of the Spirit. May the Spirit help us to take a few steps in this direction!

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12. The Holy Spirit and Christian prayer (6 November 2024)

Appeal before the General Audience

I wished to greet the Virgen de los Desamparados, our Lady who takes care of the poor, Patroness of Valencia; Valencia, which is suffering greatly, and also other parts of Spain, but Valencia which is underwater and suffering. I wanted her to be here, the Patroness of Valencia: this little image that the Valencians themselves gave to me. Today, in a special way, let us pray for Valencia and for the other areas of Spain that are suffering because of the water.

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

The sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit, in addition to the Word of God and the Sacraments, is expressed in prayer, and we wish to dedicate today's reflection to this: prayer. The Holy Spirit is both the subject and object of Christian prayer. That is, He is the One who gives prayer and He is the One who is given by prayer. We pray to receive the Holy Spirit, and we receive the Holy Spirit in order to truly pray, that is, as children of God, not as slaves. Let us think a little about this: pray as children of God, not as slaves. One must always pray with freedom. "Today I have to pray for this, this, and this, because I promised this, this and this. Otherwise, I will go to hell." No, that is not prayer! Prayer is free. You pray when the Spirit helps you to pray. You pray when you feel the need to pray in your heart, and when you do not feel anything, you stop and ask: "Why do I not feel the wish to pray? What is happening in my life?" But always, spontaneity in prayer is what helps us the most. This is what is meant by praying as children, not as slaves.

First of all, we must pray to receive the Holy Spirit. In this regard, Jesus has a very precise word in the Gospel: "If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?" (*Lk 11:13*). Everyone, each one of us, knows how to give good things to little children, whether they may be our children, our grandparents or our friends. The little ones always receive good things from us. Will the Father not give the Spirit to us? This should give us courage to move forward. In the New Testament, we see the Holy Spirit always descend during prayer. He descends upon Jesus in the baptism in the Jordan, while he "was

praying” (*Lk* 3:21), and He descends at Pentecost upon the disciples, while they “devoted themselves with one accord to prayer” (*Acts* 1:14).

It is the only “power” we have over the Spirit of God. The power of prayer: He does not resist prayer. We pray, and He comes. On Mount Carmel, the false prophets of Baal – remember that passage from the Bible – were agitating to invoke fire from heaven on their sacrifice, but nothing happened, because they were idolators; they worshipped a God that does not exist. Elijah began to pray, and the fire descended and consumed the offering (cf. *I Kings* 18:20-38). The Church follows this example faithfully: whenever she addresses the Holy Spirit, she always implores Him, “Come! Come!” And she does this especially at Mass, so that He may descend like dew and sanctify the bread and wine for the Eucharistic sacrifice.

But there is another aspect, which is the most important and encouraging for us: the Holy Spirit is He who gives us the true prayer. Saint Paul affirms this: “In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for many times we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God’s will” (*Rm* 8: 26-27).

It is true, we do not know how to pray. We do not know. We must learn every day. The reason for this weakness of our prayer was expressed in the past in just one word, used in three different ways: as an adjective, as a noun and as an adverb. It is easy to remember, even for those who do not know Latin, and it is worth keeping it in mind, because it contains in itself an entire treatise, these three things. We human beings, according to that saying, “*mali, mala, male petimus*”, which means, being bad (*mali*), we ask for the wrong things (*mala*) and in the wrong way (*male*). Jesus says, “Seek first the kingdom [of God] ... and all these things will be given you besides” (*Mt* 6:33); instead, we seek the extra, namely, our interests – many times – and we completely forget to ask for the kingdom of God. Let us ask the Lord for the kingdom, and everything comes with Him.

Yes, the Holy Spirit comes to aid us in our weakness, but He does something more important still: He testifies to us that we are children of God and puts on our lips the cry: “*Abba!* Father!” (*Rom* 8:15; *Gal* 4:6). We cannot say “Father, *Abba*” without the strength of the Holy Spirit. Christian prayer is not man at one end of the telephone, speaking to God on the other; no, it is God who prays in us! We pray to God through God. Praying means placing oneself inside God, so that God enters into us.

It is precisely in prayer that the Holy Spirit is revealed as the “Paraclete,” that is, advocate and defender. He does not accuse us before the Father, but defends us. Yes, He defends us, He convinces us of the fact that we are sinners (cf. *Jn* 16:8), but He does so in order to make us able to savour the joy of the Father’s mercy, not to destroy us with fruitless feelings of guilt. Even when our heart reproaches us for something, He reminds us that “God is greater than our hearts” (*1 Jn* 3:20). God is greater than our sin. We are all sinners, but think: perhaps some of you – I don’t know – are very afraid because of the things you have done, afraid of being reproached by God, afraid of many things and unable to find peace. Pray, call to the Holy Spirit, and He will teach you how to ask for forgiveness. And do you

know something? God does not know much grammar, and when we ask for forgiveness, He does not let us finish! “For...” and there, He does not even let us finish the word *forgiveness*. He forgives us first, He always forgives, and He is always beside us to forgive us, before we complete the word *forgiveness*. We say “For...” and the Father always forgives us.

The Holy Spirit intercedes and He also teaches us how to intercede, in turn, for our brothers and sisters – He intercedes for us and teaches us how to intercede for others. He teaches us the prayer of *intercession*: praying for this person, praying for that sick person, for the one who is in prison, praying... even praying for one’s mother in law! And pray, always. Always. This prayer is particularly pleasing to God, because it is the most gratuitous and altruistic. When someone prays for everyone, it happens – as Saint Ambrose used to say – that everyone prays for someone; prayer multiplies (*De Cain et Abel*, I, 39). This is how prayer is. This is a task that is so precious and necessary in the Church, particularly during this time of preparation for the Jubilee: to unite ourselves to the Paraclete who “intercedes for all of us according to God’s plans”. But do not pray like parrots, please! Do not say, “Blah, blah, blah...” No. Say “Lord,” but say it with your heart. “Help me, Lord,” “I love you, Lord.” And when you pray the Lord’s Prayer, pray “Father, You are my Father.” Pray with the heart, not the lips; don’t be like parrots.

May the Holy Spirit help us in prayer, which we need so much. Thank you.

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13. Mary and the Holy Spirit (13 November 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Among the various means by which the Holy Spirit implements His work of sanctification in the Church – the Word of God, the Sacraments, prayer – there is one in entirely particular, and it is *Marian piety*. In the Catholic tradition there is this motto, this saying: “*Ad Iesum per Mariam*,” that is, “to Jesus through Mary.” Our Lady lets us see Jesus. She opens the doors to us, always! Our Lady is the mother who leads us by the hand towards Jesus. Our Lady never points to herself; our Lady points to Jesus. And this is Marian piety: to Jesus by the hands of our Lady. The true and only mediator between us and Christ, indicated as such by Jesus Himself, is the Holy Spirit. Mary is one of the means the Holy Spirit uses to bring us to Jesus (cf. H. Mühlen, *Una mystica persona*).

Saint Paul defines the Christian community as “a letter of Christ administered by us, written not in ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets that are hearts of flesh” (2 Cor ;3:3). Mary, as the first disciple and figure of the Church, is also a letter written with the Spirit of the living God. Precisely for this reason, she can be “known and read by all” (2 Cor 3:2), even those who do not know how to read theology books, those “little ones” to whom Jesus says that the mysteries of the Kingdom, hidden to the wise, are revealed (cf. Mt 11:25).

By saying her “Yes” (when Mary accepts and says to the Angel, “Yes, let the Lord’s will be done” and accepts to be the mother of Jesus) it is as though Mary said to God: “Here I am, I am a tablet to be written on: let the Writer write what he wants, make of me what the Lord of all wishes” (*Comment on the Gospel of Luke*, fragment 18). At that time, people wrote on waxed tablets; today we would say that Mary offers herself like a blank page on which the Lord can write whatever He wants. Mary’s “yes” to the angel, as a renowned exegete wrote, represents “the apex of all religious behaviour before God, since she expresses, in the highest manner, passive availability combined with active readiness, the deepest emptiness that accompanies the greatest fullness” (H. Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium*).

This, then, is how the Mother of God is an instrument of the Holy Spirit in His work of sanctification. In the midst of the endless profusion of words said and written about God, the Church and holiness (that very few or no people are able to read and understand fully), she suggests a few words that everyone, even the simplest people, can say on any occasion: “*behold*” and “*let it be done*.” Mary is the one who said “yes” to the Lord, and with her example and by her intercession urges us to say our “yes” to Him too, whenever we are faced with an act of obedience to perform or a trial to overcome.

In every age of our history, but in particular at this time, the Church finds herself in the same situation as the Christian community in the aftermath of Jesus' Ascension to heaven. It had to preach the Gospel to all nations, but was awaiting the "power from on high" in order to be able to do it. And let us not forget that, at that time, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples were gathered around "Mary the mother of Jesus" (*Acts 1:14*).

It is true that there were also other women together with her in the Upper Room, but her presence is different and unique among them all. Between her and the Holy Spirit there is a unique and eternally indestructible bond that is the very person of Christ Himself, "who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary," as we recite in the Creed. The evangelist Luke deliberately highlights the correlation between the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Mary in the Annunciation and His coming to the disciples at Pentecost, using some identical expressions in both cases.

Saint Francis of Assisi, in one of his prayers, greets our Lady as "daughter and handmaid of the heavenly Father, the almighty King, Mother of our most high Lord Jesus Christ, and Spouse of the Holy Spirit" (*Fonti Francescane*). Daughter of the Father, Spouse of the Holy Spirit! The unique relationship between Mary and the Trinity could not be illustrated in simpler words.

Like all images, this one of the "Spouse of the Holy Spirit" must not be rendered absolute, but taken for that amount of truth it contains, and it is a very beautiful truth. She is the bride, but before that, she is the disciple of the Holy Spirit. Bride and disciple. Let us learn from her to be docile to the inspirations of the Spirit, especially when He suggests to us to "arise in haste" and go to help someone who needs us, as she did straight after the angel left her (cf. *Lk 1:39*). Thank you!

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14. Charisms, gifts of the Spirit for common use (20 November 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In the last three catecheses, we talked about the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit which is implemented in the sacraments, in prayer and by following the example of the Mother of God. But let us listen to what a famous text from Vatican II says: “It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, ‘allotting his gifts to everyone according as He wills’” (cf. *1 Cor 12:11*) (*Lumen gentium*, 12). We too have personal gifts that the Spirit gives to each one of us.

Therefore, the moment has arrived to talk also about this second way the Holy Spirit works, which is charismatic action. Two elements contribute to defining what charism is. A somewhat difficult word, I will explain it. First, the charism is the gift given “for the common good” (*1 Cor 12:7*), to be useful to everyone. It is not, in other words, destined principally and ordinarily for the sanctification of the person, but for the “service” of the community (cf. *1 Pt 4:10*). This is the first aspect. Secondly, the charism is the gift given “to one,” or “to some” in particular, not to everyone in the same way, and this is what distinguishes it from sanctifying grace, from the theological virtues and from the sacraments, which instead are the same and common to all. The charism is given to a specific person or community. It is a gift that God gives you.

The Council explains this too. The Holy Spirit, it says, “distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: ‘The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit’” (*1 Cor 12:7*).

The charisms are the “jewels” or the ornaments that the Holy Spirit distributes to make the Bride of Christ more beautiful. One can thus understand why the Conciliar text ends with the following exhortation: “These charisms, whether they be the more outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church” (*LG 12*).

Pope Benedict XVI affirmed: “Anyone who considers the history of the post-conciliar era can recognize the process of true renewal, which often took unexpected forms in living movements and made almost tangible the

inexhaustible vitality of the holy Church.” And this is the charism given to a group, through a person.

We must rediscover the charisms, because this ensures that the promotion of the laity, and of women in particular, is understood not only as an institutional and sociological fact, but also in its biblical and spiritual dimension. Indeed, the laity are not the least, no, they laity are not a form of external collaborator or auxiliary troops of the clergy, no! They have their own charisms and gifts with which to contribute to the mission of the Church.

Let us add another thing: when we talk about the charisms, we must immediately dispel a misunderstanding: that of identifying them with spectacular or extraordinary gifts and capabilities; instead, they are ordinary gifts – each one of us has his or her own charism – that assume extraordinary value if inspired by the Holy Spirit and embodied with love in situations of life. Such an interpretation of the charism is important, because many Christians, when they hear talk of charisms, experience sadness or disappointment, as they are convinced that they do not possess any, and feel they are excluded or second-class Christians. No, they are not second-class Christians, no, each person has his or her own personal, and also community charism. Saint Augustine responded to these in his time with a very eloquent comparison: ‘If you love,’ he told his people, “If you love, it is not nothing that you have: if you love unity, whoever has anything in that unity has it also for you. In the body, the eye alone sees; but is it for itself alone that the eye sees? It sees both for the hand and the foot, and for all the other members” (St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 32,8).

This reveals the secret of why charity is defined by the Apostle as “a still more excellent way” (1 Cor 12, 31): it makes me love the Church, or the community in which I live and, in unity, all charisms, not just some, are “mine,” just as “my” charisms, little though they may seem, belong to all and are for the good of all. Charity multiplies charisms; it makes the charism of one, of one individual person, the charism of all. Thank you!

ANNOUNCEMENT AND APPEAL

On the occasion of the International Day of the Rights of Children and Adolescents, held today, I wish to announce that next 3 February the *World Meeting on Children’s Rights*, entitled “Love them and protect them,” will take place here in the Vatican, with the participation of experts and figures from various countries. It will be an opportunity to identify new ways of assisting and protecting millions of children who are still without rights, who live in precarious conditions, who are exploited and abused, and who suffer the dramatic consequences of wars.

There is a group of children preparing for this day, thanks to all of you who are doing this. And here, there is a brave girl who is coming here... now they are all coming! Children are like that: one starts and then they all come. Let us greet the children! Thank you! Good morning!

I want to say that next year, during the Jubilee for Adolescents, I will canonize Blessed Carlo Acutis, and that on the Jubilee for Young People, next year, I will canonize Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati.

Yesterday marked one thousand days since the invasion of Ukraine, a tragic milestone for the victims and for the destruction it has caused, but at the same time a shameful catastrophe for the whole of humanity! However, this must not discourage us from continuing to stand beside the tormented Ukrainian people, nor from imploring for peace and working to make weapons give way to dialogue and confrontation to encounter.

The other day I received a letter from a university student from Ukraine, which said: "Father, when on Wednesday you remember my country, and will have the opportunity to speak to the entire world about the thousandth day of this terrible war, I beg you, do not speak only of our sufferings, but also bear witness to our faith: although it is imperfect, its value does not diminish, it paints a picture of the Risen Christ with painful brushstrokes. These days there have been too many deaths in my life. Living in a city where a missile kills and injures dozens of civilians, witnessing so many tears is difficult. I would have liked to escape, I would have liked to go back to being a child embraced by my mother, I would have liked to be in silence and love, but I thank God because through this pain, I learn to love more. Pain is not just a path to anger and despair; if it is based on faith, it is a good teacher of love. Father, if pain hurts, it means that you love; therefore, when you speak of our pain, when you remember the thousand days of suffering, remember also the thousand days of love, because only love, faith and hope give true meaning to the wounds." This is what was written by this Ukrainian university student.

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15. The fruits of the Holy Spirit, joy (27 November 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

After speaking about sanctifying grace and then charisms, today I would like to take a look at a third reality. The first, sanctifying grace; second, charisms; and what is the third? A reality linked to the action of the Holy Spirit: the “fruits of the Spirit”. Something strange. What is the fruit of the Spirit? Saint Paul offers a list of them in the Letter to the Galatians. He writes this, listen carefully: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (5:22). Nine: these are the “fruits of the Spirit”. But what is this “fruit of the Spirit”?

Unlike the charisms, which the Spirit gives to whom He wants and when He wants for the good of the Church, the *fruits* of the Spirit, I repeat - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – are the result of cooperation between grace and our freedom. These fruits always express the creativity of the person, in which “faith works through love” (cf. *Gal* 5:6), sometimes in a surprising and joyful way. Not everyone in the Church can be an apostle, not everyone can be a prophet, not everyone can be an evangelist, not everyone; but all of us, without distinction, can and must be charitable, patient, humble workers for peace, and so on. But all of us, yes, must be charitable, must be patient, must be humble, workers for peace and not war.

Among the fruits of the Spirit listed by the Apostle, I like to highlight one of them, recalling the initial words of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Jesus joy is constantly born anew” (no. 1). There will be sad moments at times, but there is always peace. With Jesus there is joy and peace.

Joy, fruit of the Spirit, has in common with any other human joy a certain feeling of fullness and fulfilment, which makes one wish it would last forever. We know from experience, however, that this is not the case, because everything here passes quickly. Everything passes quickly. Let us think together: youth, youthfulness – it passes quickly; health, strength, well-being, friendships, loves... They last a hundred years, but then... no more. They soon pass. Besides, even if these things do not pass quickly, after a while they are no longer enough, or even become boring, because, as Saint Augustine said to God: “You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You” (*Confessions*, I, 1). There is the restlessness of the heart to seek beauty, peace, love, joy.

The joy of the Gospel, evangelical joy, unlike any other joy, can be renewed every day and become contagious. “Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. ... Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 8). It is the dual characteristic of joy as fruit of the Spirit: not only is it not subject to the inevitable wear of time, but it multiplies when it is shared with others! A true joy is shared with others; it even spreads.

Five centuries ago, a saint called Philip Neri lived in Rome – here in Rome. He has passed into history as the saint of joy. Listen to this carefully: the saint of joy. He used to say to the poor and abandoned children of his Oratory: “My children, be cheerful; I do not want qualms or melancholy; it is enough for me that you do not sin”. And again: “Be good, if you can!”. Less well known, however, is the source from which his joy came. Saint Philip Neri had such love for God that at times it seemed his heart might burst in his chest. His joy was, in the fullest sense, a fruit of the Spirit. The Saint participated in the Jubilee of 1575, which he enriched with the practice, maintained thereafter, of the visit to the Seven Churches. He was, in his time, a true evangelizer through joy. And he had this, like Jesus who always forgave, who forgave everything. Perhaps some of us might think: “But I have committed this sin, and this will not be forgiven...”. Listen to this carefully. God forgives everything, God always forgives. And this is joy: being forgiven by God. And I always say to priests and confessors: “Forgive everything, do not ask too many questions; but forgive everything, everything, and always”.

The word “Gospel” means glad tidings. Therefore, it cannot be communicated with a long face and sombre countenance, but with the joy of those who have found the hidden treasure and the precious pearl. Remember Saint Paul’s exhortation to the believers of the Church of Philippi, which he now addresses to us all, and which we heard at the beginning: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near” (*Phil* 4:4-5).

Dear brothers and sisters, be glad, with the joy of Jesus in our heart. Thank you.

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16. The Holy Spirit and evangelization (4 December 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

After having reflected on the sanctifying and charismatic action of the Spirit, we will dedicate this catechesis to another aspect: the *evangelizing work of the Holy Spirit*, that is, on the role of preaching in the Church.

The First Letter of Peter defines the apostles as “those who preached the good news to you [through] the holy Spirit” (cf. 1:12). In this expression we find the two constitutive elements of Christian preaching: its *content*, which is the Gospel, and its *means*, which is the Holy Spirit. Let’s say something about one and the other.

In the New Testament, the word “Gospel” has two principal meanings. It can indicate any one of the four canonical Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and according to this definition the Gospel means the good news proclaimed by Jesus during His earthly life. After the Pasch, the word “Gospel” assumes its new meaning of good news *about* Jesus, that is, the Paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of the Lord. This is what the Apostle calls “Gospel” when he writes: “I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (*Rom* 1:16).

The preaching of Jesus and, subsequently, that of the Apostles, also contains all the moral duties that stem from the Gospel, starting from the ten commandments up to the “new” commandment of love. But if we do not want to relapse into the error denounced by the Apostle Paul of putting the law before grace and deeds before faith, it is necessary always to start anew from the proclamation of what Christ has done for us. Therefore, the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* insists a lot on the first of these two things, namely the *kerygma* or “proclamation,” on which every moral application depends.

Indeed, “in catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or *kerygma*, which needs to be at the centre of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal. (...) The first proclamation is called ‘first’ not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another through the process of catechesis, at every level and moment. ... We must not think that in catechesis the *kerygma* gives way to a supposedly more ‘solid’ formation. Nothing is more

solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation” (nos. 164-165), namely, the *kerygma*.

So far, we have seen the content of Christian preaching. We must however bear in mind also the *means* by which it is proclaimed. The Gospel must be preached “through the Holy Spirit” (1 Pt 1:12). The Church must do precisely what Jesus says at the beginning of His public ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor” (Lk 4:18). *Preaching with the anointing of the Holy Spirit* means transmitting, together with the ideas and the doctrine, the life and conviction of our faith. It means doing so “not with persuasive (words of) wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power” (1 Cor 2:4), as Saint Paul wrote.

It is easy to say, one might object, but how can it be put into practice if it does not depend on us, but on the coming of the Holy Spirit? In reality, there is one thing that does depend on us, or rather two, and I will briefly mention them. The first is *prayer*. The Holy Spirit comes to those who pray, because the heavenly Father – it is written – “give[s] the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him” (Lk 11:13), especially if we ask Him in order to proclaim the Gospel of His Son! Woe to those who preach without praying! They become those whom the Apostle defines as “a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal” (cf. 1 Cor 13:1).

So, the first thing that depends on us is praying, so that the Holy Spirit may come. The second is *not wanting to preach ourselves, but Jesus the Lord* (cf. 2 Cor 4:5). This relates to preaching. At times there are long sermons, twenty minutes, thirty minutes... But, please, preachers must preach an idea, a feeling and a call to action. Beyond eight minutes the preaching starts to fade, it is not understood. And I say this to preachers [applause] – I can see that you like to hear this! At times we see men who, when the sermon starts, go outside to smoke a cigarette and then come back in. Please, the sermon must be an idea, a feeling and a call to action. And it must never exceed ten minutes. This is very important.

The second thing, I was saying, is not to want to preach ourselves, but the Lord. There is no need to dwell on this, because anyone engaged in evangelization knows what it means in practice not to preach oneself. I will limit myself to a particular application of this requirement. Not wanting to preach oneself also implies not always giving priority to pastoral initiatives promoted by us and linked to our own name, but willingly collaborating, if requested, in community initiatives, or entrusted to us by obedience.

May the Holy Spirit help us, accompany us and teach the Church how to preach the Gospel in this way to the men and women of this time! Thank you.

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17. The Holy Spirit and Christian hope (11 December 2024)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

We have arrived at the end of our catecheses on the Holy Spirit and the Church. We will devote this final reflection to the title we gave to the entire cycle, namely: *“The Holy Spirit and the Bride. The Holy Spirit guides the People of God towards Jesus our hope.”* This title refers to one of the last verses of the Bible, in the Book of Revelation, which says: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come’” (Rev 22:17). Who is this invocation addressed to? It is addressed to the risen Christ. Indeed, both Saint Paul (cf. 1 Cor 16:22) and the *Didaché*, a text from apostolic times, attest that in the liturgical meetings of the first Christians there resounded the cry in Aramaic, “*Maràna tha!*” which indeed means “Come, Lord!” A prayer to Christ, for Him to come.

At that earliest time, the invocation had a background we would describe today as eschatological. Indeed, it expressed the ardent expectation of the glorious return of the Lord. And this cry, and the expectation it expresses, have never been extinguished in the Church. Still today, in the Mass, immediately after the consecration, she proclaims Christ’s death and resurrection “*as we await the blessed hope and [His] coming.*” The Church awaits the coming of the Lord.

But this expectation of the *final* coming of Christ has not remained the one and only. It has also been joined by the expectation of his *continuous* coming in the present and pilgrim situation of the Church. And it is this coming that the Church thinks of above all, when, animated by the Holy Spirit, she cries out to Jesus: “Come!”

A change, or better, let’s say, a development, full of meaning, has occurred with regard to the cry “Come,” “Come, Lord!” It is not habitually addressed only to Christ, but also to the Holy Spirit Himself! He who cries out is now Him to whom we cry out. “Come!” is the invocation with which we begin almost all the hymns and prayers of the Church addressed to the Holy Spirit: “Come, Holy Spirit,” we say in the *Veni Creator*, and “Come, Holy Spirit,” “*Veni Sancte Spiritus,*” in the sequence of Pentecost; and so on, in many other prayers. It is right that it should be so, because, after the Resurrection, the Holy Spirit is Christ’s true “*alter ego,*” He who takes His place, who makes Him present and operative in the Church. It is He who “declare[s] ... the things that are coming” (cf. *Jn* 16:13) and makes them desired and expected. This is why Christ and the Spirit are inseparable, also in the economy of salvation.

The Holy Spirit is the ever-gushing source of Christian hope. Saint Paul left us these precious words, this is what Paul says: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (*Rm 15:13*). If the Church is a boat, the Holy Spirit is the sail that propels it and lets it advance on the sea of history, today as in the past!

Hope is not an empty word, or a vague desire of ours that things may turn out for the best; hope is a certainty, because it is founded on God’s fidelity to His promises. And this is why it is called a theological virtue: because it is infused by God and has God as its guarantor. It is not a passive virtue, which merely waits for things to happen. It is a supremely active virtue that helps make them happen. Someone who fought for the liberation of the poor wrote these words: “The Holy Spirit is at the origin of the cry of the poor. He is the strength given to those who have no strength. He leads the struggle for the emancipation and full realization of the people of the oppressed.”

The Christian cannot be satisfied with *having* hope; he or she must also *radiate* hope, be a sower of hope. It is the most beautiful gift that the Church can give to all of humanity, especially at times in which everything seems to be dragging down the sails.

The apostle Peter exhorted the first Christians with these words: “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” But he added a recommendation: “But do it with gentleness and reverence” (*1 Pt 3:15-16*). And this is because it is not so much the strength of the arguments that will convince people, but rather the love that we know how to put in them. This is the first and most effective form of evangelization. And it is open to everyone!

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Spirit always, always help us to “abound in hope by virtue of the Holy Spirit!” Thank you.

APPEAL

Every day I am following what is happening in Syria, in this moment that is so delicate in its history. I hope that a political solution may be reached that, without further conflicts or divisions, may responsibly promote the stability and unity of the country. I pray, by the intercession of the Virgin Mary, that the Syrian people may live in peace and security in their beloved land, and that the different religions may walk together in friendship and mutual respect for the good of the nation, afflicted by so many years of war.

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