

Guided by the Holy Spirit



Christopher News Notes

“COME, HOLY SPIRIT!” This prayer is one of the oldest in Christianity, but what do we know about the Holy Spirit? The biblical references to this third person of the Trinity seem shrouded in poetry. The Holy Spirit has been represented as an advocate, a dove, tongues of fire, a swift wind, and the animating power of God.

The Holy Spirit cannot be manipulated to our will, however. It is full of surprises, miracles, and blessings, if we are ready to open ourselves to God’s will.

Meg Hunter-Kilmer, a youth minister who spent 10 years traveling the country and speaking about God's love to teenagers, writes, "If we truly invite the Holy Spirit to do His work in us—to be Lord of our lives and drive all that we do—we will be absolutely shocked by what He's able to accomplish. When Scripture says God's power is able to do 'infinitely more than we can ask or imagine,' that's no exaggeration. And it's not just a promise of miracles from without; this is God's power at work in us."

If we want a life guided by the Holy Spirit, we have to begin by trying to understand this mysterious manifestation of God, who speaks directly to our hearts.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

"Glory be to Him whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine."

—Ephesians 3:20

When Jesus was finishing His earthly ministry, His disciples were unsettled about what would come next. How could they carry on the Son of God's work when they were just fishermen, accountants, and laborers? The Lord tells them not to worry, that He will send "an advocate" to them, someone who will speak on their behalf. Little did the disciples know this would be the very Spirit of God, speaking not to them but *through* them.

With the arrival of Pentecost, the disciples become filled with the power and energy of God, as well as the skills to spread the message. Suddenly, they can speak foreign languages fluently. They can heal the sick, the blind, and the paralyzed. They can break chains of imprisonment. They do all this not for their own power and glory, but to proclaim the glory of God and Jesus Christ. Immediately after Pentecost, St. Peter—the very same man whose frailty caused him to deny Jesus three times—stands up in front of a crowd to proclaim the Good News.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit is the star of the show, helping the apostles perform great miracles and bring countless more Christians

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit isn't some relic of the distant past. Baptized Christians today are recipients of the same Spirit that fired up the hearts of the early Church. According to tradition, there are seven particular gifts of the Spirit: wisdom, understanding, right judgment, knowledge, fortitude, reverence, and fear of God. With prayer and attention, you can find them at work in your own life.

Wisdom: Some of us think wisdom is all about knowledge and intelligence, but true wisdom integrates the head and the heart as they work together to discern the truth and the right path. The Book of Wisdom says, "[Wisdom] is a breath of God's power...She is a reflection of eternal light, a perfect mirror of God's activity and goodness."

Understanding, Knowledge, and Right Judgment: These gifts can lead to peace, trust, and hope. They are the quiet voices of the Spirit, speaking to us through our conscience, as well as experience and observation. They guide us to live our lives in the right ways.

Fortitude: The Holy Spirit offers us the same courage, determination, and endurance that were given to St. Peter and the apostles when they first spoke to crowds about Jesus and the mission of the Church. Speaking up about faith, repentance, and the love of Christ is never without risk, but the Holy Spirit helps us push past our fears and into action.

Reverence and Fear of God: Fear, in this case, does not refer so much to a feeling of terror that God will hurt us, but rather the holy awe and humility we should experience when we recognize God's hand in the world around us. When we discern God in nature, music, art, the look of a child, or the love between family members, we are receiving a gift of the Spirit. Reverence will often follow these moments, knowing that the creator of the universe made and loves us individually and unconditionally.

into the fold. Like real fire, the fire of the Spirit spreads and leaves everything in its path changed. Unlike real flames, the Holy Spirit enlivens and energizes instead of destroying. This shows us something about the way God's love works. It goes from one person to the next, magnifying as it travels. It gives courage, eloquence, and just the right words in the right situation.

The Church went on to institute the sacrament of Confirmation in which candidates become "sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit," allowing them to better put God's love into action in this world. Effie Caldarola writes in *Catholic Review*: "Come, Holy Spirit...Such a simple prayer and yet so full of meaning in our faith...I have come to realize that the prayer doesn't mean the Holy Spirit is ready to give me whatever I want, or to solve a problem according to my directions. It does mean, I firmly believe, that invoking the Holy Spirit—if done with

an open and willing heart—can inspire me to do better or to choose the better path. You know the old adage, 'Prayer doesn't change God, it changes the one who prays.' It's true."

A Life Led by the Spirit

In the middle of the 19th century, the U.S. was awash in new ideas about religion. Throughout the young country, there was a revival of interest in spiritual practices and finding deeper meaning in life. One such seeker was Isaac Hecker, who was baptized a Methodist but spent years going from church to church, trying out different denominations. He even spent time as a Transcendentalist, befriending Henry David Thoreau of *Walden Pond* fame. Hecker eventually found his way to the Roman Catholic Church, where he was ordained a priest and founded a new order that spread all over the world: the Paulists.

Hecker's theology centered on each person's unique call by the Holy Spirit. Father Brett Hoover, a Paulist priest, writes, "He understood the Spirit as an ever-present guide for seekers, but he had also felt the power of the Spirit in his own life. These moments of awakening were so powerful that Hecker became convinced that the whole world could be transformed if only people would be more attentive to the movements of the Spirit in their own souls."

Father Hecker believed that the Holy Spirit is active and breathing life into all things, and that the inner restlessness people sometimes experience can be a good thing if it points them towards something greater: namely, God. Seekers should not flee the suffering of the world, but work to alleviate it where possible with the help of a community of other seekers. Most importantly, don't be locked into a preconceived notion of what the Holy Spirit is or what its movement should look like. Each person's call can be different. Be open to the way God is using the Spirit to call you to your unique role in the world. By following the teachings of Jesus and staying in tune with what makes you more loving and open to others, you can cultivate a connection with the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit at Work

In 1991, Catherine Zardus began the Magic Carpet Theatre group to bring stories to children. Though raised Catholic, she was never very religious until experiencing a major conversion. After that moment,

she felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to use her theatre program to bring Scripture stories to life.

"I think I am a very Holy Spirit kind of roller; I believe in the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and so I just try to keep my heart and my ears open," Zardus told *Detroit Catholic*. "When I would go to Mass, I would hear the parables, and being a director and an actor, I could imagine how to stage it and put myself in the scenes."

Her visionary approach launched The Parable Project, which focused on acting out the drama of Gospel parables. While originally intended for children, a group of women Zardus was working with asked to bring the play to a women's conference. She focused on stories of women in the Gospels and called it "At His Feet." It grew in popularity and was soon performed all over the Detroit area. The more she followed the promptings of the Spirit, the more her work took on significance and resonated with others. Soon, she was hearing from people whose faith was enriched by her performances, an outcome she would have never even dreamed about when she began her career.

Zardus said, "We have a beautiful prayer that starts the shows for The Parable Project: 'Open my ears to hear You; open my mind to know You; open my heart to love You.' I try to really stay open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit."

It Starts & Ends with Prayer

One thing is certain: an invitation to the Holy Spirit starts and ends with prayer. God is close to your heart and knows you better than you can imagine. He is waiting to send His Spirit into your life! You can begin by praying the simple prayer, "Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and kindle in them the fire of Your love. Send forth Your Spirit, and they shall be created." So, pray and listen!


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

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*"O Holy Spirit, descend plentifully into my heart.
Enlighten the dark corners of this neglected
dwelling and scatter there Thy cheerful beams."*

—St. Augustine