

A close-up photograph of a hand reaching out from the left side of the frame towards the center. The hand is positioned over a body of water with gentle ripples. The lighting is soft and natural, creating a serene and contemplative atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the upper half of the image.

DO YOU  
KNOW  
THE  
HOLY  
SPIRIT?

*Michelle*  
KAREN D'SILVA

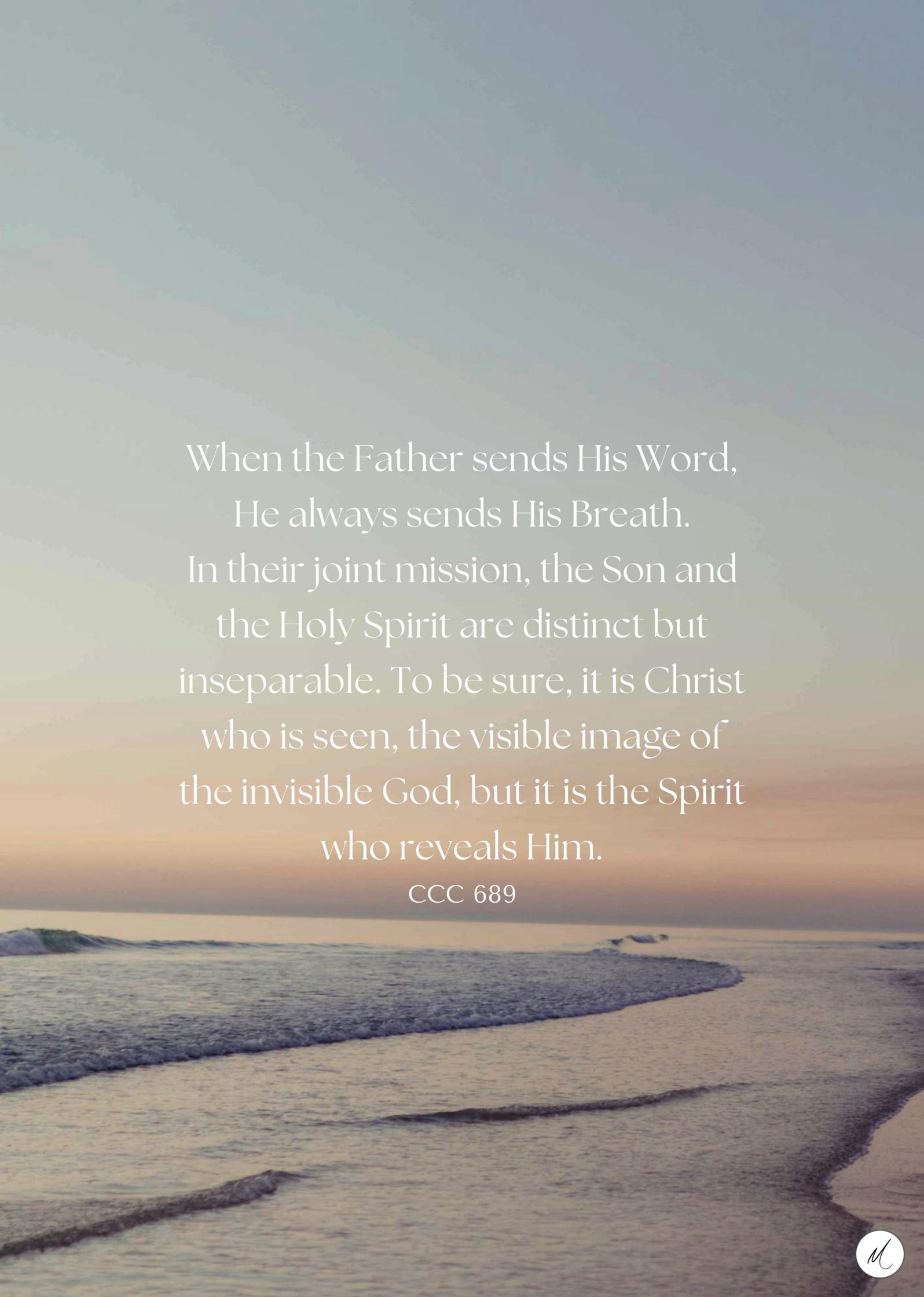
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When the Father sends His Word,  
He always sends His Breath.  
In their joint mission, the Son and  
the Holy Spirit are distinct but  
inseparable. To be sure, it is Christ  
who is seen, the visible image of  
the invisible God, but it is the Spirit  
who reveals Him.

CCC 689



# Who is the Holy Spirit?

‘Who is the Holy Spirit?’ is perhaps one of the most daunting questions of our Christian faith. The Holy Spirit is mentioned more than 800 times in scripture, yet it is no secret that many great theologians and saints throughout history have struggled to understand the Holy Spirit, often referring to the Spirit as the “forgotten” or the “least spoken member of the Triune God.” In 2008, Pope Benedict XVI said, “The Holy Spirit has been in some ways the neglected person of the Blessed Trinity.”

Much of our confusion can be attributed to the fact that we as humans are wired to see, to touch and to relate. God as Father is revealed through one of our first and most important relationships – our earthly father. God as Son is revealed to us in the Incarnation. But where does the Holy Spirit fit in?

Think about how our Church experiences are replete with symbols like water, oil, fire, wind, dove, force and more. But this is also where most of our misunderstanding comes from.

*Ruach*, the Hebrew word for ‘spirit’ can also be translated as breath or wind. The same is true for the Greek word *pneuma* in the Old Testament. According to Lifeway Research, about sixty percent of self-identifying evangelicals believed that the Holy Spirit is a force. A force has power, but not personality. When two magnets repel each other, we observe their force, but we would never dream of trying to have a personal relationship with them. If the Holy Spirit is a force, we will want to take hold of it.

When we look at the Holy Spirit as some power, wind or a mighty force, we end up calling Him an ‘it’ or a ‘what’, rather than a ‘Who’.

CCC 689 affirms – The One whom the Father has sent into our hearts, the Spirit of His Son, is truly God; Consubstantial with the Father and the Son, the Spirit is inseparable from them. When the Father sends His Word, He always sends His Breath.

Sacred Scripture demonstrates the Holy Spirit to be both personal and masculine when examined more fully. “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name — He will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you” (John 14:26, NABRE).

The inspired author refers to the Spirit not as an “it”, but as a “He.” Notice also that Jesus says, the Holy Spirit will both teach and remind us “all that [He has] said to [us].” Action follows being. One cannot teach and remind if one does not have the intellectual powers unique to rational persons. The Holy Spirit here is clearly recognized as One who has emotions, will and intellect, just like a person. When God’s Spirit fills us, He sheds abroad God’s love in our heart, making our spirit rise up to say, “Abba, Father” (Romans 5:5, 8:15). This is the intimacy we are invited to.



## CONSIDER THESE MYTHS:

MYTH 1:  
The Holy Spirit is a “force” or “energy” or “power”

MYTH 2:  
The Holy Spirit is a dove

MYTH 3:  
The Holy Spirit didn't exist in the Old Testament

MYTH 4:  
The Holy Spirit is of a lesser status than the Father and the Son

MYTH 5:  
The Holy Spirit is just a part of God

MYTH 6:  
The Holy Spirit gives us “goosebumps” to reveal His presence

MYTH 7:  
The Holy Spirit is not always present with us

MYTH 8:  
We do not need to pray to the Holy Spirit



# I Believe in the Holy Spirit

Recall for a moment the ecstatic joy that the disciples experienced when Jesus rose from the dead. Their joy knew no bounds. Their beloved master was alive! And yet, He was going to leave them. What were their thoughts when He was lifted up to heaven in their sight? Why couldn't He be with them as before? (Acts 1:11) They were confronted with the great Promise, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7).

What is this advantage? It is the advantage of having the indwelling Presence of God, the manifestation of His Power, the ability to do greater things than Jesus (John 14:12), the constant companionship of God until the end of age (Matthew 28:19-20) and the outworking of miracles, signs and wonders in and through the Person of the Holy Spirit.

There is no Christianity without the Holy Spirit. Remove the Holy Spirit and all we are left with is a shell of religious activities, with no resultant life change.

The early Church understood this secret. They looked to, depended upon, proclaimed about, and interacted with the Holy Spirit. He was a vital part of their lives. But it is important to understand that the Holy Spirit didn't just show up in the book of Acts on the day of Pentecost. He has been at work for the salvation of the world with the Father and the Son since creation. Scripture opens with the Holy Spirit – In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters (Gen 1:1-2)

and ends with the Holy Spirit – The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." (Revelation 22:17)

As CCC 703 rightfully affirms: "The Word of God and His Breath are at the origin of the being and life of every creature."

It is the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament who empowered prophets to work great wonders in the midst of God's people. It is the Holy Spirit who carried out specific missions like He did with Moses as they crossed the Red Sea, depicting God's great hand of deliverance. It is the Holy Spirit who overshadowed the Blessed Virgin Mary at the time of the Annunciation and anointed humanity with Divinity to affect the Incarnation of the Son of God. It is the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 6:10). It is the Holy Spirit who came upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost and the Church was born.

The Holy Bible, which is the inspired word of God along with Sacred Tradition, one of the fountains of Divine revelation, are attributed to being inspired by the Divine Author, the Holy Spirit.

Further, the Holy Spirit takes on an even more significant role during the Eucharistic prayer in the liturgy of the Mass. As the celebrant's hands are extended over the bread and wine, the Holy Spirit falls upon meagre elements and transforms them into the Body and Blood of Christ.

A special presence of the Holy Spirit in ecclesial work is noted in the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation. The Holy Spirit is the way by which our sins are touched by the forgiving love of Jesus and washed away in the bath of His precious Blood.



By our common Baptism, Confirmation, and participation in the other grace–dispensing Sacraments of the Church, the Spirit lives in us and prepares the Church to combat fallen humanity’s tendency to break away from God and from others in sin.

Through the intimacy of personal prayer, He draws near to us as a friend, a companion, and our guide just like the Father and Jesus. It is in this intimacy that we become docile to His heavenly inspirations. In our docility and receptivity, He works powerfully like He did in the life of Mary. He brings about fruit and holiness making us the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Our conversion, sanctification, transformation and

holiness depend upon our relationship with the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier.

So how can we better appreciate the Holy Spirit as a person? One approach is to study His many attributes and roles so that we are better equipped to understand His relationship and respond to Him. The more we learn about His Personhood, the more we are assured of His Presence that whispers, speaks, shares, guides and loves.

In the words of Pope Francis, “If people were to listen to the Holy Spirit, they would hear Him say, ‘God loves you.’”

### We come to know the Holy Spirit personally

- in the Scriptures
- in Sacred Tradition
- in the Church’s Magisterium
- in the Sacramental liturgy
- in personal prayer
- in the charisms
- in the signs of apostolic and missionary life
- in the witness of saints



# The One Who Comforts

“GOD DOES NOT COMFORT US TO MAKE US COMFORTABLE, BUT TO MAKE US COMFORTERS.”

JOHN HENRY JOWETT

What does a post-pandemic world look like for you? The pandemic not only affected the poorest of the poor, but thrust the world into a whirlwind of fear, uncertainty, loss and tragedy. Our daily lives were shaped by the power of death in more ways than one.

More than anything, we longed for comfort.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines comfort as ‘to give strength and hope to; to cheer; to ease the grief or trouble of; to console.’

However, when faced with fear, there is an inherent tendency inside us to retreat and run or crave for the wrong kind of comfort. Celebrity videos and grocery store discounts did little to ease our overall fear during the pandemic. The world's comforts were like pain relievers, numbing us at the peripheries, while hardly penetrating our hearts. They soothed us on the outside but couldn't heal us from within. This is because it is not ‘something’, but ‘Someone’ Who can truly comfort us – the Holy Spirit. The relative comfort we feel in our modern world is only a mirage ready to expire, but the comfort of God through His Spirit will remain with us until the end of age.



## MORE THAN A FEELING

Having announced His impending departure, Jesus exhorted His disciples not to be troubled in heart or mourn at their separation but be encouraged with the special promise of Another Comforter. This term ‘another’ signifies His personal distinction from the Father and the Son, yet inseparable in the attributes concerning the nature and Divinity of God.

Jesus said, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever" (John 14:16-17). In the presence of the Holy Spirit, the love and comfort of the Father and Son would draw near to them, not just to be with them but to live in them.

Think about the events following the cross. Filled with fear of the Romans and weighed down by guilt for having betrayed their closest friend and Master, the disciples locked themselves in a room. What did they need at that moment? Not the power to do miracles or the knowledge to evangelize. They needed comfort. They needed a touch of heaven. They needed assurance that all was not lost. They needed the intimacy of His friendship to begin anew. They needed reconciliation. They needed Peace.

John 20: 19 tells us that as Jesus entered through the locked doors into the room where they were gathered, He breathed on them the Holy Spirit and said, "Peace be with you". He stilled their fears. He comforted their hearts. And He comforts us. He comes to the most tender, fragmented parts of our hearts, not to fix us, but to bring us into communion; to a love that will never end.

‘Comfort’ then in the context of the Comforter is so much more than a feeling of encouragement or cheer. It is the very Presence of God. Outside this comfort, not only is there fear of misery in this life, but also the fear of hell in the next.



## GOD OF ALL COMFORT

The Apostle Paul was no stranger to affliction and was plagued by the threat of death throughout his life. He was shipwrecked, beaten and put in prison many times. Though surrounded by misery, he was able to comfort distressed fellow inmates. This is because he had encountered the ultimate Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

In *Acts 27*, we read about how he was caught up in a terrifying storm and didn't see the sun or stars for many days and gave up all hope of survival. There an angel appeared to him and reminded him not to be afraid. In the end, everyone reached the land safely. The Apostle was comforted not by being removed from his circumstances, but by experiencing the comfort of the Holy Spirit in the midst of it all.

In the benediction of *2 Corinthians 1:3-7*, Paul spoke of the Lord as the 'God of all comfort'. Later in the epistle, Paul would expound on the necessity of suffering that brings credibility to the apostolic call and exhorted believers everywhere to remain faithful, share the gospel and continue to trust the Lord in all circumstances.

The experience of Paul, the apostles and the saints, give us hope. Despite their fears and failings, despite rejection and persecution, everything changed when they received the Spirit. While their weaknesses and problems did not disappear, they were no longer afraid of them or of those who were hostile to them.

They understood that God never promises to free us from suffering entirely. Instead, He promises to be with us in our suffering and comfort us,

while giving us the grace to endure it (*2 Corinthians 12:8-9*). In his homily in the Octave of the Ascension, Saint Bonaventure said, "where the trials are greater, He brings greater comfort, not like the world which comforts and flatters us when things go well, but derides and condemns us when they do not."

When we yield our lives to the Great Comforter, remarkable and unexplainable things happen. His Presence confiscates chaos and instills peace. His comfort levels fear and enkindles faith. His promise rips away our tendency to control and produce comfort. Is it any wonder why the apostles risked their lives and were ready to lose all they had for the sake of Christ? Why they were willing to give up everything (*Acts 2:45*)? Why they persevered and even multiplied when the Church was under great attack?

It is because they experienced the 'God of all Comfort' through the Holy Spirit.



## BECOMING LITTLE COMFORTERS

There is temptation in our suffering to isolate and withdraw from people. Suffering, if not rightly positioned, can turn our focus on to ourselves. Therefore God beautifully designed comfort as a means to aid fellow-sufferers along the way. No matter how deep our pain or loss, we are never alone.

As we look for and receive comfort from God, we become spurred by the Spirit to comfort others. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we become “little comforters” in our world. We do this by drawing near to others, not just through nice words, but through prayer and closeness. In his homily, Pope Francis specified that the consolation of the Spirit is different from the “consolations of the world.” These are “anesthetics”, he said, “they distract us, but do not cure the deep evil that we carry inside.” Instead, the Spirit is “the very tenderness of God, Who does not abandon us.” It is this Spirit we carry to those who are walking by the graveside of their loved ones, those who are battling mental illness alone, those who are wrecked with shame and guilt, those who are rejected and dehumanized because of their sin.

Elisabeth Elliot, a Christian author and speaker of the 20th century said rightfully, “When I need refreshment, it isn't easy to think of the needs of others. But I have found that if, instead of praying for my own comfort and satisfaction, I ask the Lord to enable me to give to others, an amazing thing often happens – I find my own needs wonderfully met.”

Our common love for Jesus and our experience of His comfort must lead us to recognize each others

burdens. We need connections that bleed joy. We need frequent pauses in our fast-paced culture to listen, step in and comfort others. We need the gift of our shared stories to become more visible. We need to foster communal harmony. We need more ‘comforters’ in a world drowning with perishable comforts.

Fittingly, the Gospel is beautifully on display when we redeem our suffering by taking our eyes off from ourselves and turning them to God to find strength and then toward others, to offer the same comfort we have received from God.

It is then that we have truly encountered and experienced the God of all comfort.



# The One Who Counsels

EVEN MORE, WHAT THE FATHER GIVES US WHEN OUR PRAYER IS UNITED WITH THAT OF JESUS IS "ANOTHER COUNSELOR, TO BE WITH YOU FOREVER, EVEN THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH."

CCC 2615

It is no secret that we live in an imperfect world that includes forces opposed to God's original design. Not everything works out the way we hoped for. The brokenness of life is manifest all around us. Relationships become strained and often break down. Marriage's crumble and disintegrate. Parents cope with wayward children. People who once were close friends now live their lives separated from one another because of betrayal and hurt.

How are we to deal with such brokenness? Many Christians turn to counseling. Fittingly, counseling provides a safe haven to share the fractured parts of our story without fear and gain perspective. But as important as counseling is to our well being, there are some blind spots which even well-renowned counselors cannot detect – only One Who knows us perfectly and intimately: Our Heavenly Counselor.



## TEACH AND REMIND

In [John 14:26](#), Jesus brings clarity to the Presence of the Holy Spirit and the role He plays in directing our lives. He introduces the Holy Spirit as our Counselor, as One who provides counsel, advocacy and guidance during the challenging crossroads and trials of life.

Notice that Jesus says, the Holy Spirit will both teach and remind us “all that [he has] said to [us].” The intoxication of our culture makes us forget what we should remember and recall what we should forget. This is especially true in an era of social media scrolling and instant gratification. But the sober intoxication of the Holy Spirit as St. Cyril of Jerusalem says, makes us remember what is central to the Gospel and to our faith – the love of God and His constant companionship in our Christian walk.

The Holy Spirit reminds us that Jesus is continually alive in our lives, no matter where we find ourselves at. He imprints in the hearts of believers the words Jesus spoke, so that they become within us a principle of evaluation for our choices and our daily actions.

A. W. Tozer, a Christian author and evangelist, writes that it is quite evident in scriptural revelation that spiritual things are hidden by a veil and by human nature, we do not have the ability to comprehend and get hold of them. Aside from the Holy Spirit, the Gospel message can seem like a jigsaw puzzle. In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus stated the absolute necessity of a new birth if man is to see the Kingdom of God. He made it plain that apart from this new birth, man cannot understand heavenly things ([John 3:3](#)).

Paul tells us: “Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” ([1 Corinthians 2:14](#)).

It is the Holy Spirit Who takes the things of God and makes them plain to our hearts and minds. It is through the Presence of the Holy Spirit that we come to understand the Bible. The Holy Spirit is deeply connected with bringing God’s Word, the Sword of the Spirit, to us. One of the fundamental beliefs of the Church is that the Holy Spirit inspired all the writers of Scripture. As the Creed itself says, He is the one ‘Who spoke through the prophets.’ This truth leads to an extraordinary conclusion: it means that each time we are reading Scripture, we are hearing what the Spirit says to us.



## TRUTH AND FREEDOM

We live in a ‘whatever world’ of relativism where ultimate truth is treated like a fairy tale, an outdated idea or even an insult to human intelligence. Believe whatever you want. Live for whatever brings you pleasure, as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone. And of course, be tolerant. But where does that leave us? And what ground does that provide for our ethical, moral and spiritual decisions?

Jesus, referring to the Holy Spirit as our Counselor, told us that His primary role would be to bring us and the whole Church into the fullness of truth. Jesus said to His disciples, “the Holy Spirit, He will guide you to all truth”, He himself being “the Spirit of truth” (John 16:13).

The Holy Spirit is a voice of truth in a world drowning with lies and falsehood. What He tells us to do may not be the most enticing option on the surface, but our consciences confirm that it will edify us in the long run. He doesn’t just want to fix our situations, He wants to free us from within.

Pope Francis writes, “The Counselor desires to graft His counsel into our hearts and interiorize it, making it become a part of us, flesh of our flesh.” His counsel can always be trusted. He not only guides us into the Truth, but also helps us enter into a deeper communion with Jesus Himself, gifting us knowledge of the things of God.

## WORD AND WORSHIP

How can we train ourselves to recognize the counsel of the Holy Spirit?

One of the most effective ways to improve our ability to listen to the Holy Spirit is to spend time in worship and study the Word of God. Worship transforms us to see God for Who He is, aligns our spiritual posture and changes our hearts.

During challenging times, we are tempted to opt for quick fixes and settle under pressure, rather than lean on the Holy Spirit for counsel. Other times, we love our comfort zones and diminish the animation of the Spirit Who desires to extend our boundaries, enlarge our tents and give us new gifts to do greater things.

When in doubt, ask yourself:

- Is this in agreement with God’s Word?
- Is this consistent with God’s character?

We can be rest assured that as we lean and abide in His Presence, the Spirit will lead us toward pursuits and activities such as ministry work or serving occupations that will bless those around us. We may feel moved to teach Sunday School or pursue a degree so we can use our skills to serve our community. In our heart, we will gain peace that lets us know that we are doing the right thing and on our way to becoming a lantern of hope in a dark world.



“Our Divine Teacher holds His school within the souls of those who ask Him and who really want to have Him as their Teacher. His action is preceded by the beaming rays of His light and knowledge. He comes with the truth of the real protector; for He comes to save, to heal, to teach, to counsel, to strengthen, to console, to illumine in the first place the mind of the person who receives Him, and through that person’s works, the minds of others.”

ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM  
(Catechesis on the Holy Spirit, 1)



# The One Who Defends

THE SPIRIT-PARACLETE, SENT BY THE RISEN CHRIST, CAME TO "CONVICT THE WORLD CONCERNING SIN", BY REVEALING HIM WHO IS ITS REDEEMER.

CCC 388

If you are familiar with *Oliver Twist*, the old fable written by Charles Dickens, then you are aware of the familiar angst we all feel when we desire true freedom within, but opt for everything lesser instead.

In the story, Oliver's mother dies giving birth to him and he is raised in an orphanage. As fate would have it, he is subject to a cruel taskmaster who overworks him with little or no reward. Unable to withstand the injustice, Oliver escapes to London where he meets sultry street kids who teach him how to cope with life, all while having fun. But Oliver quickly realizes that they are the product of a godfather, a man named Fagin, who uses young boys to do his bidding through cheating and stealing. In other words, they are his slaves. Having escaped from one prison, Oliver finds himself shackled in another. The more he tried to free himself, the more broken his life became.

Perhaps you identify with *Oliver Twist*? How many battles have we lost when trying to pursue the seductive spotlights of the world rather than turn to the luminous light of the Holy Spirit? How often have we been tricked and tossed out by the 'godfathers' of this world in whom we have placed our trust, rather than obey the One Who pleads our case continually before heaven's throne?



## OUR DEFENSE ATTORNEY

In [John 14:16](#), prior to His departure, Jesus assured His disciples, ‘And I will ask the Father, and He will give you Another Advocate to be with you always.’ In Latin, the word ‘*advocatus*’ refers to a person called in to speak for and plead one’s cause. In Greek, the translation is referred to as ‘*Parakletos*’ or ‘Paraclete’, someone who comes alongside to defend, like a defense attorney. As the disciples were sent into the world like lambs in the midst of wolves, they were assured of another Paraclete besides Jesus Himself, Who would walk alongside them in the midst of their battles and raise a battle cry on their behalf.

But where there’s a defender, there’s also an accuser. The word Satan means “accuser”, “adversary” or “one who opposes.” Satan is like a prosecutor, standing before God and claiming that all of humanity is guilty. He is known as the accuser of the brethren ([Revelation 12:10](#)), always reminding God’s children of how short they have fallen. Satan insinuates his lies into the courtrooms of our lives. His influence is manifest among the many corrupt judges in this world who accept bribes to rule on behalf of someone who has done great harm to another or just plead guilty to avoid a more brazen punishment.

How contrary are these ways from the Holy Spirit? Unlike these crooked individuals, the Paraclete leads us into a place of truth and love. His love sets us free from within. Because the Holy Spirit is the love of God Who is poured into our hearts ([Romans 5:5](#)), He drives out superficial loves. He convicts us of sin not by condemning us, but in a way that propels us to true freedom to live as children of God.

This is how He stirred the soul of the Samaritan woman to leave behind her jar of vanity and seek the Living Water that fully satisfies. This is how He comforted Hagar in the desert as she found herself alone after having been unjustly treated. This is how He elevated the life of Mary Magdalene, intercepting her path with truth and infusing her heart with the mandate to ‘Go, sin no more’, which ultimately propelled her into sainthood. This is how He comes to us. He walks alongside us. He defends us and He encourages us to swim against the secular tide that wages war against the sacred, fight the good fight and finish the race ([2 Timothy 4:7](#)).



## CUT TO THE HEART

In John 16:8, Jesus said, “And when He comes, He will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.” Some translations use the word ‘convict’.

The word convict is a translation of the Greek word *elencho*, which means “to convince someone of the truth; to refute or cross-examine a witness.” The Holy Spirit acts as a prosecuting attorney who exposes evil, reproves evildoers and convinces people that they need a Savior. He takes the words spoken by human beings and uses them powerfully to bring conviction.

This is what transpired on the day of Pentecost. As Peter spoke, the hearers were “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37) and many came to genuine repentance. This is the work of the Spirit. He exposes the sin of unbelief, He reveals the righteousness of Jesus and He brings us to the truth of salvation.

Pope John Paul II’s theme, “Be not afraid” continues to resonate with us through the ages as we wage war against the adversary of our soul. “Be not afraid of the truth about your sin, your weakness, and your failings, says the Spirit. For the judge happens to be the one Who loves you so much that He died for you.”

How comforting is this truth? We don’t have to remain enslaved by the ‘godfathers’ and ‘taskmasters’ of this world. Through the help and defense of the Holy Spirit, we are freed from our spiritual orphanages and the many courtrooms of life that have left us powerless.

Unlike the judges of this world, we can rest assured, this Advocate does not just come and go. He is here to stay!



“Enrich your soul in the great  
goodness of God:  
The Father is your table, the  
Son is your food, and the Holy  
Spirit waits on you and then  
makes His dwelling in you.”

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA



# The One Who Intercedes

INTERCESSION IS A PRAYER OF PETITION WHICH LEADS US TO PRAY AS JESUS DID.

CHRISTIAN INTERCESSION PARTICIPATES IN CHRIST'S, AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

CCC 2634, 2635

It is tempting to think of the Holy Spirit only in some mystical way. The tongues of fire, the mighty wind, the ground shaking events at Pentecost, can delude us into thinking that the Holy Spirit can be found only in grand supernatural feats. But Sacred Scripture, the Church's teachings and the many testimonies of the saints teach us otherwise. They bear witness to the intimate relationship God desires to have with us through the Holy Spirit. This relationship is manifest not only in spectacular phenomena, but is seen evidently as the daily events of the believer's life unfold through the intercession of the Holy Spirit.

The word 'intercede' means to stand in the gap.

How many times have we felt powerless in our weaknesses? How often have we experienced dryness and desolation in prayer? Since prayer is an essential factor in the Christian life, it is not surprising to find that the Spirit of God is deeply involved in this sphere. It is the Holy Spirit Who intercedes and helps us in our incapacity. He illuminates our minds, warms our hearts and carries our prayers toward the heights of God.



## WE DO NOT KNOW HOW

If you've at some point believed that a Christian cannot be an effective witness without enduring effective prayer, you are not alone. We have all experienced this dilemma – we do not know how to pray as we ought. We want to pray, but God seems distant. We want to speak, but lack the language. We want to articulate our thoughts, but find them muddled and indisposed.

This very predicament, these lack of words, these incoherent thoughts, even the lack of desire to come to God in prayer, is in fact a prayer that the Holy Spirit not only understands, but also carries, interprets and intercedes to God on our behalf. Unaided by Him, we would likely pray for things not only contrary to God's will, but injurious to ourselves. In fact, we can dare to say that it is precisely our incapacity and weakness which becomes through the Holy Spirit true prayer with God. Hence Paul's injunction, "Pray at all times in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18).

There are times when we are going through difficult trials, that we are brought to our knees before God and just do not know what to say to Him. Maybe it is a sudden death or a financial crisis or a betrayal or a diagnosis of a life-threatening disease. We know that God is in control but we do not know what to ask. And the reason that we have this weakness is because we do not possess the blueprint of our life. But the Spirit does.

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26). In His intercession, the

Spirit not only intercedes for what is weighing on our hearts, He brings them into conformity with the will of God and prays the perfect prayer to God on our behalf. He knows our every need more intimately than we do. He gazes into the depths of the Father's will with complete clarity. Since all of His requests are perfectly in line with God's will, His requests are continually granted.

The Holy Spirit intercedes for us "with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26) or wordless groanings that are in accord with God's will. Whether it is a decision in marriage, that choice of career, that medical diagnosis, that move to another city, we can rest assured that the Spirit knows God's perfect will. Sometimes, God will surprise us in the way He answers our prayers. Instead of giving us what we want, He gives us something infinitely better (Ephesians 3:20).

Also, the Word of God is inspired by the Holy Spirit and so we can rest assured that He will never move us to pray for anything that is not sanctioned by Scripture. The Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God (1 Corinthians 2:11) and perfectly interprets the promises of God. Knowing that God's thoughts have been revealed to us by the Spirit in the written Word of God, we can have great confidence that the words the Spirit prays on our behalf to the Father are always perfectly in accord with Scripture.



## GROANING IN HOPE

Very often in prayer, we plead with God to deliver us from physical and spiritual evil and even do it with great trust. But when our prayers remain unanswered, we are left with the impression of not being heard and experience spiritual desolation. But the truth is, God is faithful to hear all of human cry. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He redeems us from our false understanding of who God is and transforms the way we see our present suffering (Romans 8:18). He helps us understand that we are not exempt from trials, but can find new meaning and purpose as we persevere. In many ways, as St Paul says – we “groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23).

It is this Hope, a hope that keeps groaning and won't give up that is poured in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. It is a hope that will never disappoint us, no matter what reality permeates our lives. This Hope enables us to abandon and overcome every form of fear and slavery to live out our authentic call as disciples of Jesus. Because this Hope finds its source in the Holy Spirit, it does not end in us, but opens oneself to become intercession for others, a channel of hope for all creation.

In *The Dialogue*, the Lord said to St. Catherine of Siena, “In love you ought to help your neighbors spiritually with prayer. You harm your neighbors by depriving them of the prayer you should be offering to me on their behalf.” It is the Holy Spirit Who lays special burdens of prayer on the believer on behalf of others.

## COME HOLY SPIRIT

When we open every prayer, every meeting, every decision with the prayer “Come, Holy Spirit”, the Spirit indeed comes and fills our hearts and enkindles the fire of His love. As we yield to His counsel and submit to His intercession, we can rest assured that He will arouse us from our spiritual lethargy and warm us out of our lukewarmness. He will set our hearts ablaze to long for intimacy with the Father and Son and enkindle our desire for prayer. He will lay certain desires so pressingly upon our hearts that we can never rest till they are fulfilled. He will make the zeal for God's house to eat us up and the passion for God's glory to be like a fire within our bones.

We can be encouraged by the fact that we are not expected to know the will of God in every respect and that it is ok to groan in our ignorance. God's love for us is not defined by how well we respond, nor is it limited by what we understand. In our perplexity and in our groaning, we are not only being watched, but we are also being understood by the Holy Spirit. In our suffering, decay, sickness, futility, persecution, failed plans, baffling afflictions and decisions, we are being helped. We are being loved. We are being prayed for by the Holy Spirit.

Pope Francis reminds us – Let us not forget, the Spirit is present; He is present in us. Let us listen to the Spirit, let us call to the Spirit — He is the gift, the gift that God has given us — and let us say to Him: “Holy Spirit, I do not know your face — we do not know it — but I know that you are the strength, that you are the light, that you are able to make me go forth and to teach me how to pray. Come, Holy Spirit. This is a beautiful prayer: Come, Holy Spirit.”



CONSIDER THESE SPECIAL ATTRIBUTES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:

JOHN 16:8

He convicts us of sin

JOHN 14:16-17

He permanently indwells us

EPHESIANS 1:13

He seals us

JOHN 14:26

He teaches us

JOHN 16:13

He guides us into all truth

JOHN 14:26

He reminds us

GALATIANS 5:22-23

He bears fruit through us

JOHN 16:7

He comforts us

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7

He equips us with spiritual gifts

EPHESIANS 5:18

He fills us

ACTS 1:8

He empowers us



# The One Who Sanctifies

“THE ONLY REAL SADNESS, THE ONLY REAL FAILURE, THE ONLY GREAT TRAGEDY IN LIFE, IS NOT TO BECOME A SAINT.”

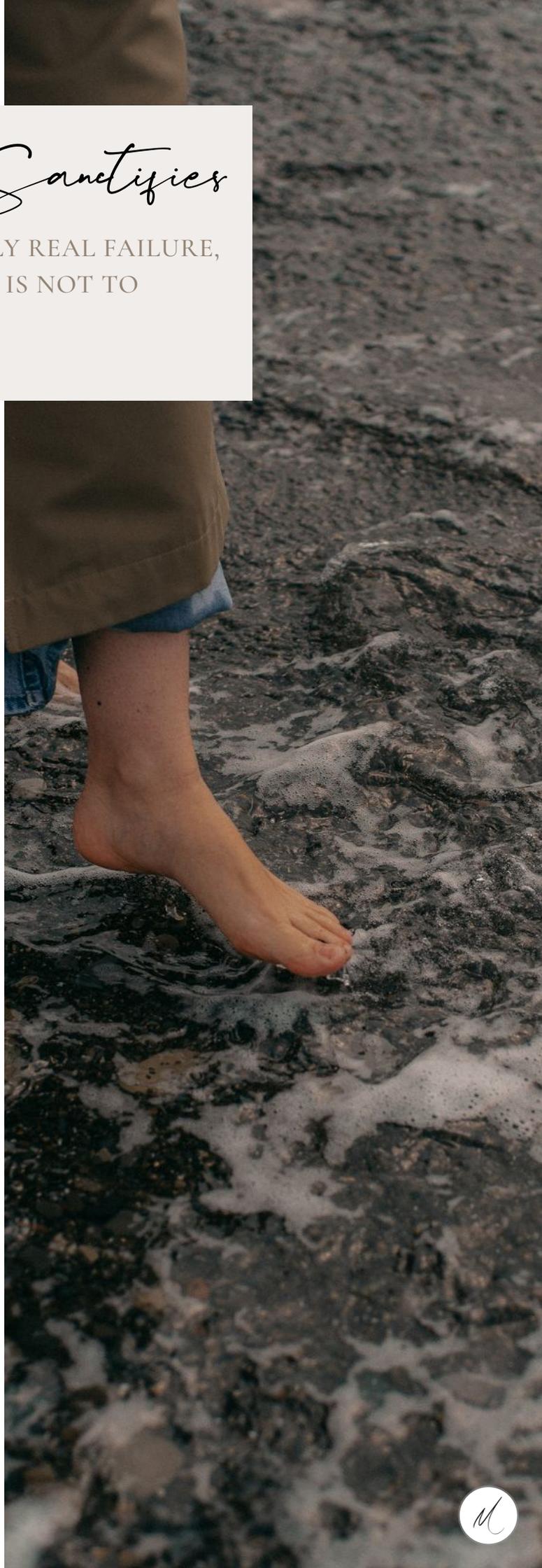
LEON BLOY

Think for a moment what it means to be Christian. When we encounter the person of Jesus Christ, we testify how the Gospel comes alive in a new way. How it becomes a beacon of hope for sinners and how our sins are washed by the blood of Jesus Christ as we are adopted into His family as sons and daughters. But encounter is only the beginning of our journey. God’s goal for every baptized Catholic is to move us from a place of encounter to a place of empowerment and thus “fulfill the vocation of man” (CCC 1699).

That is the work of the Holy Spirit: to empower, transform and sanctify us. We are changed into Christlikeness and we bear fruit as disciples of Jesus Christ. In and of ourselves, we are totally depraved. Therefore any ounce of righteousness, any good desire or godly thought, even the ways we seek after God, is the work of the Holy Spirit. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).

We know that God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (Romans 5:5), but this is not the end of our journey. This life changing miracle continues throughout the believer’s life. Like a seed that is planted and grows, we are transformed daily into the image of Christ with the promise that He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

This is called sanctification and the Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier.



‘Sanctification’ comes from two Latin words: *sanctus* which means holy, and *ficare* which means make.

So to sanctify means to make holy. It means to be set apart and set aside for the higher purposes of God. This is the call of sainthood. At the heart of Christian life is the encounter with Jesus Christ, but the ongoing call of becoming disciples is the journey of sanctification.

The Second Vatican Council Fathers made great efforts to overcome the false idea that holiness was only reserved for a chosen few or only for religious and priests. In *Lumen Gentium*, we read – Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised as “uniquely holy,” loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself

up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her. He united her to Himself as His own body and brought it to perfection by the gift of the Holy Spirit for God’s glory. Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification.”

This proves that all faithful of Christ, regardless of hierarchy or experience, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity through holiness and sanctity.

In and through the Holy Spirit, we are able to surrender fully to God in love, seek to follow His ways and obey the mission He has entrusted and ordained for us from all eternity.



## BECOMING SAINTS

If you've ever passed through the Notre Dame cathedral doors to pray and contemplate, then you know that the rose window is a fascinating work of art. It is a massive circle of intricate mixture of different shapes of glass and colors that are held together at the center of the wheel.

The circle is a shape with no beginning and no end, intending to draw our imagination into contemplating the perfection of God. At Notre Dame (which means Our Lady), the rose window has Mary at the center holding the Christ child. The picture is clear: when Christ is at the center, all the pieces of our life are held together (*Colossians 1:17*). They exuberate a beautiful pattern of color and light because they are connected to the Source of Light, the Source of Life: Christ Himself. This is the picture of sainthood.

How often do we settle for less? How often do we have misconstrued perception of saints? We perceive them as praying all the time, devoid of fun and marked with suffering. Sainthood however is anything but monotonous. Saints are the most spontaneous, creative, courageous, freest people we know. They are not "supermen" as Pope Francis says, rather they are ordinary people who followed God "with all their heart."

By virtue of our Baptism, by virtue of our Confirmation, we have been given everything we need to become everything we ought to be so that we can go and set this world on fire as St. Catherine of Sienna often remarked. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. He gives us passions and desires that were never part of our lives. His gifts break through the barriers of gender, age and

personalities. He equips and empowers us to do greater things.

Pope Benedict XVI says, "In accepting the power of the Holy Spirit you too can transform your families, communities and nations."

This is what we learn from Mary. She is the first missionary, the first evangelist, who teaches us how to be missionaries by surrendering our lives to the control of the Holy Spirit. Young Mary's "yes" intrigues us. It's not a passive yes that conveys a sublime and cynical resignation. Mary's "yes" is joyful and demonstrates her commitment to go beyond herself in the service of others even at great risk. *Luke 1:39* says, "Mary set out and went with haste" – not the kind of haste where we don't know what it means to wait, but haste to share the good news and bring Christ's light to a world in darkness.



## RECEIVE THE POWER

Despite the limitations and faults of men, the Church continues to be driven by the wind of God, animated by His sanctifying fire. The Spirit is on a mission of Divine love. This love overcomes all barriers, dispels all fears, and empowers us to truly enter into the perpetual gift of self.

This is the miracle of Pentecost. Men who were cowardly and only thinking about themselves, were empowered by the Holy Spirit to go beyond themselves. They gave up all their possessions, left everything behind and even paid with their lives. But they could not do it alone and neither can we.

We cannot become saints by our own power. We must be radically dependent upon the Holy Spirit for everything. Our own weaknesses, failings and egos will get in the way every single time. We need a power greater than our own. In **Acts 1:8**, Jesus reminded His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit and receive His Power. To 'receive' is to become vulnerable. To receive also means we are to let go of what we are holding onto.

Our culture is falling apart at the seams. In our pursuit for the lesser loves of this world, we have failed in our pursuit of holiness. We have failed to be salt and light in the world. We have failed to pursue our baptismal call of sainthood.

In the upper room at Pentecost, the whirlwind of Heaven shook the foundations of the place, as tongues of fire rested upon the disciples. This same Spirit continues to shake our own personal foundations today, not as a destructive force but as a striking clarion call to conversion. Pope Francis says "the Holy Spirit makes us

uncomfortable", meaning He has no other intent than our growth in holiness. As we receive His Power, we are moved to make those changes that are necessary for us to be more closely conformed to Christ. We are moved beyond complacency and our own comforts and concerns to respond to the needs of others. We are moved beyond justice to the grace of mercy. We are moved to live sacrificially in charity and community.

The celebration of Pentecost reminds us of just that – right now, here in the present, the Spirit is constantly seeking human hearts. He is actively producing in us the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. His fire desires to run deep to transform us to be fully free, fully alive and fully connected to Christ.

*Will we continue to refuse God's call to become saints or will we step firmly on the path to lead souls to the freedom that can only come from Christ through a life of holiness?*





“Let us invoke the Holy Spirit:  
He is the artisan of God’s works.  
Let His gifts shape you.”

POPE BENEDICT XVI

