

Supplemental Information for
Why Catholic? Journey through the Catechism
The Profession of Faith: What We Believe
To group leaders of
Christ the King Parish, Springfield, Illinois

By Deacon Al Laabs
February/March, 2010

Session 9: "The Holy Spirit and the Church"

Suggested Environment

Note again that there is a recommendation for the USCCA to be a part of each table arrangement. By the time you review this we will have celebrated Ash Wednesday, so it is appropriate to have a violet/purple color displayed as part of your environment. Since I am a firm believer in the power of imagery, let me encourage you to look for some images of the Holy Spirit, and perhaps print one as part of your environment. Google's image search will produce a number of them of which the following are a few examples:



Lifting Our Hearts

Note the tone the prayer sets as an understanding of what the Spirit means to us. We are praying for energy, inspiration, guidance, "fire," and certainly out of our need for wisdom and renewal. Might be a nice prayer to suggest repeating during this Lenten season in which we pray for renewal and enter into prayer, fasting, and works of charity to "change our hearts."

Sharing Our Good News

Last week's session on the Paschal Mystery is obviously the end point of our Lenten preparation and it wouldn't hurt to form a question about how an action following session 8 was tied into "my overall Lenten journey." Perhaps even a direct question such as "Did anyone

experience a connection between what you are doing for Lent and an action that might have been prompted by our session on the Paschal Mystery?"

Reflection One "The Holy Spirit: Gift of God"

It is a nice story and fits in well with the idea of the Spirit as the animating presence of our God in our life. I would highlight the words "...God used their ordinariness..." and "It was the Holy Spirit who changed fearful disciples into courageous witnesses for Christ." What might be a good direction to suggest here is to think of ways that God can use "our ordinariness" to build the kingdom here on earth. What was striking is to think of how ordinary those first apostles were in contrast to St. Paul who was highly educated in scripture and rabbinic tradition. I recall one of our elderly parishioners who complained she couldn't drive anymore and all she could do was to "bake casseroles" for the funeral lunch crew. Well what a wonderful thing that is to do and maybe we can give encouragement to each other that our very ordinary and down to earth activities, even if it is only praying daily for those who are ill, can build God's kingdom among us.

That promise that God gave to his apostles is our promise too and can become the dynamic force that allows us to witness to the vision we have through faith. The remaining paragraphs have some wonderful ideas in them such as the example of Mary who was animated by her faith and God's spirit to trust God's word and so brought forth God's incarnated Son among us. I also think you should pause over the symbols of the Spirit mentioned in the next to last paragraph on page 67. It might be fun to ask where in scripture we can recall those images or symbols are found. Hint: CCC 694-701 contains good citations for those images which show God's revealing hand to us.

There is a definite tie and a terribly important one between the opening line in the last paragraph on page 67, "The whole New Testament is filled with the presence of the Spirit," and the blue box at the top of page 68 with its heading "The Holy Spirit is God's Love." In fact you might want to tie that opening sentence in the blue box which emphasizes doing our everyday duties with great love back to the idea of how important are all the ordinary things we do in our daily lives. **Thérèse de Lisieux**, who is called the [Saint of the little way](#), died at age 24, but because of her exemplary life and her writings was made the 33rd Doctor of the Church by Pope John Paul II in 1997. Don't leave this first part of this session without a good sense that God's spirit working through our ordinariness and our love is what builds the kingdom and animates the world towards the Father. The reason for this is that what we then do collectively as "church" or assembly of believers with that same spirit forms us into God's people.

Just as an aside, here is an insight into the Little Flowers lifelong devotion to praying for priests (remember this year we are to pray especially for priests and priestly vocations):

"At fourteen, Thérèse had understood her vocation to pray for priests, to be "an apostle to apostles." In September 1890, at her canonical examination before she professed her religious vows, she was asked why she had come to Carmel. She answered "I came to save souls, and especially to pray for priests." Throughout her life she prayed fervently for priests, and she corresponded with and prayed for a young

priest, Adolphe Roulland, and a young seminarian, Maurice Bellière. She wrote to her sister "Our mission as Carmelites is to form evangelical workers who will save thousands of souls whose mothers we shall be." Information from her biography and from [Vatican website proclaiming her as Doctor of the Church](#).

Scripture: Pondering the Word

"The Thessalonians' faith and example."

1 Thessalonians 1: 2-10

- 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers, unceasingly
- 3 calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope² of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father,
- 4 knowing, brothers loved by God, how you were chosen.
- 5 For our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and (with) much conviction. You know what sort of people we were (among) you for your sake.
- 6 And you became imitators³ of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit,
- 7 so that you became a model for all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.
- 8 For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth not only in Macedonia and (in) Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.
- 9 For they themselves openly declare about us what sort of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God
- 10 and to await his Son from heaven, whom he raised from (the) dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the coming wrath.

This scripture is taken from the USCCB web site and the footnotes in the small colored letters can be accessed back to their site. Let me just highlight that St. Paul wants to attribute their witness and the affect their example has had to the work of the Spirit. What he is also speaking about, as the text suggests, is the joy that comes from the Spirit alive in our lives. Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit. As a reminder, the fruits of the Spirit are described in the following scriptural quote: **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."** (Galatians 5:22)

Sharing Questions

Both questions are excellent and very thought provoking. I would especially encourage you to broaden that first one from not only how aware am I but in what ways have I been

conscious of the spirit directing me. I think that too often we overlook the many small ways I feel the Spirit touches us. That nagging little voice you sometimes hear when you know you should do something isn't always something your spouse may have said. Perhaps it's the voice of conscience at times gently urging you towards the good. Sometimes it may take the form of an insistent curiosity that may find us buying a book about our faith. Sometimes it may take the form of restlessness when we are stuck in the same track for a long while and feel something urging us onward. I also feel that when we have "waves of compassion" for others who are suffering or a sense of injustice over how someone's being treated; well, perhaps it is the spirit of love touching an open heart, a heart that is willing to listen. So who knows what fruits those little prods and pushes can produce when at their source is God's love. After all if our hearts are at all open to accepting God's Spirit, which is a gift to us, who can say for sure what good will result. If we believe that God is our companion on our journey, then let's not be too hesitant to see his hand, his Spirit, his grace, in our lives in so many ways. So we begin each day with grateful hearts for his Spirit's presence when our feet hit the floor.

Reflection Two: "Forming the People of God"

These first several paragraphs are a good reminder as has been mentioned elsewhere in this series of God's hand working through history to form a people, to reveal Himself to us as the creator, loving God. It is well for us to remember again that we are the new Israel, the spiritual heirs of the people to whom God first chose to reveal Himself. That second paragraph reminds us also that at the heart of our understanding of God is the communion of persons we call the Trinity. Just as the Trinity is a communion of love, so also should love, the greatest commandment, be at the heart of our relationships to one another in community. So building God's kingdom on earth is all about establishing our relationships on the basis of love, the ultimate symbol of that love, the length to which it must go, we have already seen in the Paschal Mystery. As St. John tells us in his Gospel, "God so loved the world that he sent his only son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Jn 3:16

We all know the story of Pentecost and the effect that the Spirit had on the apostles who had fled when Jesus was arrested and who, except for the beloved disciple and his mother, Mary, did not even witness our Lord's death. [Chapter two of the Acts of the Apostles](#) is well worth reading for telling the story of the effect of the Spirit on those same apostles. I would also suggest that CCC 752 is worth reading aloud since you hear in it the echo of Word and Sacrament which continue along with the Spirit to sustain the Church.

I do think it is worthwhile to make sure there is a good comfort level with our image of Church as the people of God. If somehow that tornado that hit south of CTK in March of '07 had been a half a mile north, we might have had the experience of celebrating "Church" in our parking lot. This past Sunday we had the experience of sending our catechumens and candidates through RCIA to the rite of election at the Cathedral. That's a great image of "Church" with the broader emphasis on the people of God as stretching from the Indiana border to the Missouri border. Someday I hope that everyone who reads this will have the privilege of standing in St. Peter's Square on a Sunday morning for the Pope's blessing and feeling that wonderful sense of universal Church that flows from the many languages and faces.

You might want to read a few paragraphs of the [Vatican II document, Lumen Gentium](#), which was the first document issued by the council. It is on the Church in the world and notice when you take a look at it that it has as an introductory heading “The Mystery of the Church” for the first chapter. For it is really only through the eyes of faith that we can fully understand the mystery of God’s love in the Spirit at the heart of our Church as described in the very last paragraph on page 69. I heartily commend your reading and underlining of that paragraph. I would especially recommend you point out those effects of the Church on us and on the world: “sacraments, sanctifying, strengthening, empowering, healing, reconciling.” For it is in those mysterious ways that God’s Spirit acts on us, draws others to us by our example, and allows us to be Church to one another in diverse ways that we will see more fully in the next session.

Let me suggest that you point out to your group the “Spotlight on the Catechism” box to the left on page 70. An earlier box mentioned the gifts of the Spirit and this box celebrates the effects of those gifts we call the “fruits” of the Spirit. You might remind your group of the very beginning of the Eucharist prayer just before the Consecration, the celebrant calls down the Holy Spirit on our gifts on the altar with the words: “Lord, you holy indeed, the fountain of all holiness, let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.” At those words at CTK the server rings the bells once.

Sharing Our Faith

There are some great questions for contemplation and discussion. I think I would be most intrigued by the second one since it is probably the most personal and one that would allow good insights to others of how it is possible to experience the Spirit at work in us. I still remember Bishop Wycislo, now deceased, of the Green Bay Diocese who was a participant at Vatican II. He wrote a book based on his experiences and I recall him sharing with me and several others how “palpable” the feeling was that the Spirit was present through all the years of the Council. I always like to share my own story of how my classmates and I marveled at the work of the Spirit as we studied two semesters of Church history and watched barbarian invasions, the dark ages, the black plague, bad popes, and host of other problems and yet the Church, the people of God, still stands today. It must have something to do with the Rock at its base and the animating Spirit alive in our hearts even today when we have our own contemporary issues that challenge us.

Living the Good News

In keeping with my past recommendations, I do suggest encouraging reading some part of the Acts of the Apostles. As mentioned, Chapter two is a good place to start but also take a look at Chapter four. It has several good lines: 4: 8 “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit...” and then notice 4: 13 “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and **ordinary** men...” You will also be especially intrigued by Chapter five where the apostles experience the hostility of the High Priest and the Elders and

Sadducees. Those last lines from 5: 33 to 42 bear reading. It is the story of Gamaliel, a wise Pharisee who observes that if the preaching and what they men are doing is from man, then it will fail, but if it is from God, “...then in that case you may even be fighting against God.”

Lifting our Hearts

Note the suggestion to offer spontaneous prayer for closing. Be a good example and begin by suggesting perhaps, “May the Spirit of God guide us in our Lenten journey of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, Let us pray to the Lord. Note the response in keeping with our session:”**Send us your Spirit, and we shall be renewed.**” Also, as always, encourage prayer for all the intentions we carry in our hearts and the many people for whom we have committed to pray.

Addendum Note: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to allaabs1770@gmail.com

Note: You may find using this web link a wonderful article that was posted on February 19, 2010 on the Archdiocese of Washington by [Msgr. Charles Pope on the subject of reverencing mystery](#). Last session I gave some paragraphs from Gerald Hall, sm., on mystery. I think this section five from Msgr. Pope’s article says a lot about how the Spirit of God lives and works within the people of God. This is section five from his short article (remembering *Lumen Gentium*’s first chapter heading “The Mystery of the Church”):

5. Consider the mystery of the Liturgy and the Sacraments- We see much in the Liturgy and the celebration of the Sacraments but far more remains hidden from our eyes as these mysteries are celebrated. (You may well know that the Eastern Churches and especially the Orthodox Churches refer to the sacraments as the “Mysteries”). Consider a baby being baptized. We see the water poured and hear the words. Perhaps there is a cry. But what remains unseen is even greater: The child dies, is buried with Christ and rises to new life with him in an instant (Rom 6:1-4). Sin is washed away, an inheritance is received, true membership into the Body of Christ is conferred, the office of Priest Prophet and King are received, divine sonship is conferred and on and on. Far more is actually happening that we see or even know. This is mystery, something seen, yet far, far more unseen. Consider the Liturgy, the altar is there, a priest, the faithful gathered, words and gestures perceived. But far more is unseen: Christ the high priest is the true minister, the physical church building gives way to the truth that we are mysteriously caught up into heaven and the heavenly liturgy surrounded by countless saints and angels worshipping the Father and we as members of the Body of Christ render the Father perfect praise and thanks through, with and in Jesus our head.