

LESSON 7

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PRAYER

BACKGROUND READING



We only know the Father through the Son, but the only way we can truly get to know the Son is through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts, which is why we call our bodies temples of the Holy Spirit. It is through Him that we can know Jesus, who reveals to us the Father. We can gain this knowledge only through prayer, and it is the Holy Spirit moving within us that allows us to pray.

The Holy Spirit Moves Us to Pray

As we have seen time and time again, God is the one who calls us first to enter into a relationship with Him. The Holy Spirit is the one who moves us to respond to God's call, and at the same time fills us when we say yes. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is so intimate that it is often described as a spousal relationship. Think of the Blessed Virgin Mary. At the Annunciation, the Archangel Gabriel said she was "full of grace," which we will explore more deeply in the next lesson. When she said yes to God, she opened her heart to Him completely and became the spouse of the Holy Spirit. The Archangel Gabriel explained to her that she would be able to conceive Jesus because the "holy Spirit will

come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35). Only through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is Mary then able to know Jesus in the most intimate way humanly possible, through the relationship of mother and child. When she visits her cousin Elizabeth, who is also with child, it is the Holy Spirit who moves her to proclaim one of the most beautiful of Christian prayers, the Magnificat, where she says, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." Her soul reflects God to all others because she has opened her heart to Him so completely that she does not have room for anything that is not of God in her soul.

So it is with us. The Holy Spirit must fill our hearts if we are to pray. The *Catechism* says, "The Holy Spirit, whose anointing permeates our whole being, is the interior Master of Christian prayer" (2672). He is the one that moves us to pray. He is the one who transforms our attitude of the heart so that our hearts aren't closed—absorbed with our desires and needs so that there is no room for God and the needs of others. The Holy Spirit opens our hearts. An open heart has room for God and sees the needs of its neighbor

because to love God means that we also love those made in His image. This openness lets God in. It teaches us to listen. Only by listening can we enter into conversation, saying “I love you, too” to God’s declaration of love.

The Holy Spirit Is Life

God makes a promise to His people through the prophet Ezekiel in the Old Testament, saying, “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26). This is a promise of transformation into new life. This promise is fulfilled in Jesus when He says, “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit” (John 3:5). Jesus said these words when He was speaking to Nicodemus, a Pharisee who recognized that Jesus had been sent by God. One night he sought Jesus out, and Jesus explained that no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born to new life of water and the Spirit. Here Jesus is referring to the new life we receive in the Sacrament of Baptism, which is when the Holy Spirit first enters into our hearts. The new life we receive is the Holy Spirit. Only because the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts are we able to speak to God the Father as His children. We can dare approach God, we can get to know Him, we can call Him Father, because He is already inside our heart, transforming our heart.

The Holy Spirit Is the Life of the Church

Before Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles in the form of tongues of fire 50 days after Jesus’ Ascension, Jesus’ disciples were in hiding for fear of their

lives. After receiving the Holy Spirit, they were filled with the zeal and bravery to preach to Word of God to the ends of the earth. At that instant the Church was born. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is what gave the Church new life. The Apostles so overflowed with the Holy Spirit that they received the Gift of Tongues to proclaim the Word of God in every language so that anybody who was listening could hear. This was the Church’s Magnificat.

Peter and the Apostles did not speak their own words, but rather the words the Holy Spirit inspired them to speak. They had no more fear because they had complete trust in God’s Spirit. Jesus Himself tells us to banish all fear and worry and to trust in the Holy Spirit, saying, “When they take you before synagogues and before rulers and authorities, do not worry about how or what your defense will be or about what you are to say. For the holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say” (Luke 12:11–12).

In the same way, the Holy Spirit moves us to speak in prayer. These words of prayer do not necessarily need to be spoken aloud or proclaimed to others. They can be silent, interior words, or not even formal words at all, but an impulse of love to the Father, or the simple gaze of contemplation of the Son. But in our heart’s every movement toward the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is the one that carries us there.

The Twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit

When we live in the Spirit, we can see the effects of the Spirit’s transformation in our lives. Sometimes, it seems that God asks us to do the impossible. Jesus says, “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect”

(Matthew 5:48). Of course, by the very fact that we are limited human beings, it is impossible for us to do what Jesus said of our own power. How can we hope to imitate the perfection of God? It is the Holy Spirit who is our hope. Because God's very Spirit lives inside of us, we can hope to have a relationship with God that actually transforms us into being holy and pleasing to God.

The Church defines Twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit, which are attributes or perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in our souls when He lives inside of us. These

Twelve Fruits are: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity. These fruits are not formed in our souls complete. They start off as seeds, which through the life of prayer and virtue grow to bear fruit. When we observe the Holy Spirit's peace, kindness, patience, and all His other fruits growing in our lives, then we can be assured that He is working within us. Nothing waters the seeds of the Holy Spirit's fruits more than a life of prayer.