



The Baptism of the Lord January 10, 2016 C

Have you been baptized in the Spirit? If not, is it something you desire?

In today's Gospel, John says to his followers who wonder if he is the Messiah, "*I baptize you with water.... But he [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*" Then Luke tells us how Jesus himself is "baptized with the Holy Spirit." Empowered with the Spirit, Jesus:

- ◆ teaches with authority
- ◆ heals the sick and casts out demons
- ◆ befriends sinners and shows them God's mercy and compassion
- ◆ becomes an advocate for the marginalized
- ◆ above all, through the power of the Spirit, is able to embrace God's painful path for his life.

Promise of the Spirit. Before returning to his Father, Jesus promises to send the Spirit on his followers (Acts 1:8). What happens on Pentecost Sunday in the Upper Room is the fulfillment of that promise. All 120 disciples gathered in the Upper Room are "baptized in the Spirit." Result: those who have locked themselves up in the Upper Room now become 'fearless proclaimers' of the Good News about Jesus.

What about you and me? Are we "baptized in the Spirit"?

The answer to the above question is 'yes'—and maybe 'no.' What do I mean by that? We are definitely baptized in the Holy Spirit if we have received the sacrament of Baptism. But the important question is: how operative is the Holy Spirit in our lives? As someone said: "We have the Spirit (through Baptism) but does the Holy Spirit have us?" Maybe the Holy Spirit is locked up in our lives just as the Apostles were locked up in the Upper Room. We may have the Holy Spirit but he may not be very operative in our lives because we pay little or no attention to him.

Charismatic Renewal—a post-Vatican II movement of the Holy Spirit

In 1967 at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, what became known as the Charismatic Renewal was born during a weekend retreat. One of those present was Patti Gallagher Mansfield. If you google her name, you will

find out more about the beginnings of a spiritual movement that transformed the lives of millions of Catholics all over the world, especially in the 70's and 80's—including my own.

I came to the Orlando Diocese in August 1972. Weeks later, I attended my first *Charismatic Prayer* meeting where I saw a large number of ordinary Catholics from several local parishes:

- ◆ sing joyful songs to the Lord—often with hands raised up
- ◆ stand up and freely witness about their experiences of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit
- ◆ devour Scripture and share passages that had touched their lives. None of these people had read Scripture before joining the renewal movement
- ◆ pray over others for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit
- ◆ pray with others for healing of body, mind and spirit, and become involved in various ministries in their parishes.

Frequently, the charismatic experience was referred to as a 'release of the Spirit.' The Spirit given in the Sacrament of Baptism was now, as it were, 'out in the open' and released and active in people's lives.

It was all quite amazing for me. Like so many other people raised in the pre-Vatican II Church, the Holy Spirit for me was the 'unknown person of the Trinity.' Like the Christians in Acts 19, we could say that we had never heard of the Holy Spirit nor had any relationship with the Holy Spirit.

But for the millions of Catholics now 'baptized in the Spirit,' this was not the case. Their involvement in the Charismatic Renewal helped them have their own 'personal Pentecostal experience' with the Holy Spirit. In the words of Paul in Romans 5:5, "*The love of God had been poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit.*"

In time, Catholics entered into a *personal relationship* with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit in various other ways, e.g., through *Marriage Encounter*, *Cursilio Movement*, *Christ Renews His Parish (CRHP) retreat weekends*, etc. For some people, a new relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was established through

participation in Bible Study and/or a heightened personal prayer life.

But yet today, millions of Catholics, including many church-going Catholics, do not have much, if any, relationship with the third person of the Trinity. Sadly, the Holy Spirit is still the unknown Person of the Blessed Trinity.

Five suggestions for experiencing a ‘release of the Spirit’ in our lives

All of us, including myself, could be more in tune with the Spirit in our lives. Only the Blessed Mother lived a life perfectly in tune with the Spirit. The rest of us are seeking to catch up with her. Many of us might say that we have a relationship with the Holy Spirit and frequently experience his presence and activity in our lives. But the reality is there is always the need to experience and strive for *more growth in the Spirit*.

If our relationship with the Holy Spirit is weak or hardly existent—or if we are seeking a better relationship with the Spirit, what are some things we can do to bring about a spiritual awakening or growth in the Spirit? The following are five suggestions:

- ◆ *First, desire it, want it, hunger for it.* God will probably not give us what we are not looking for.
- ◆ *Begin to pray for a fresh outpouring or release of the Spirit in our life.* Our prayer could be as simple as “*Come Holy Spirit, take possession of my life.*” We could also pray regularly the beautiful prayers at the end of my column.
- ◆ *Seek to grow in awareness of the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our life.* As I said earlier, we receive the Holy Spirit through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, but does the Holy Spirit have us? Is he operative in our life? Certainly, the Spirit *is* working through us whether we realize it or not, as for instance, when we perform works of charity. An important part of spiritual growth is *noticing* and *responding*, i.e., noticing *the ‘promptings of the Holy Spirit’* inviting us to move in a particular way, and *responding* to whatever prompting we feel. The more we do this, the more the Holy Spirit will be ‘released’ into our lives, and the more we will be ‘acting in the Spirit.’
- ◆ Make the Holy Spirit more and more a part of our daily life. Parents should constantly ask the Holy Spirit to help them to be wise and good parents. They should seek the Spirit’s guidance on how to better use their time, treasure and talent.
- ◆ Be a part of a small group of believers who are also seeking to live their lives in tune with the Holy Spirit.

Take time to read Galatians 5:18-23 in which Paul speaks about the ‘fruits of the flesh’ and the ‘fruits of the Spirit.’ Two of the fruits of the flesh that most of us struggle with are impatience and self-control. In 5:22-23, Paul names nine ‘fruits of the Spirit.’ When these fruits are manifested in our lives, we know that the Holy Spirit is very much active and operative in our lives. For a good examination of conscience, the two questions for all of us to ask are:

- ◆ To what extent am I living my life according to the fruits of the flesh?
- ◆ To what extent am I living my life according to the fruits of the Spirit?

Prayers to the Holy Spirit. The best way to begin or deepen our relationship with the Holy Spirit is by praying to him. We can pray to the Spirit spontaneously or we can pray the prayers below. The first one is from Daytime Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours.

Breathe on Me, O God

Breathe on me, breath of God,
Fill me with the life anew,
That I may love the things you love,
And do what you would do.
Breathe on me, breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with you I have one will,
To live and to endure.
Breathe on me, breath of God,
My soul with grace refine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with your fire divine.
Breathe on me, breath of God,
So I shall never die,
But live with you the perfect life
In your eternity.

Prayer by St. Augustine

Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
that I love but what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
to defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,
that I always may be holy.
Amen.

Have a blessed week,

