

The Fire of the Spirit

Acts 2:1–11
Psalm 104:1, 24, 29–31, 34
Romans 8:8–17
John 14:15–16, 23b–26

This morning I want to think with you about the Presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. The Holy Spirit is described in Acts as alighting upon Mary, the Apostles and the others gathered in the room where Jesus had instituted the Eucharist as:

“tongues of fire”

Let’s sit with this picture for a bit. Fire has various attributes. I want to mention three. Fire illuminates. Fire consumes. Fire warms. We can think of the presence of the Holy Spirit in these three ways.

1. The Holy Spirit illuminates our minds so we can understand the teaching of the Gospel.
2. The Holy Spirit refines our bodies by consuming that which is not of Jesus.
3. The Holy Spirit warms our souls so we can witness to his presence in our daily lives.

Let’s look at each of these in turn.

The Illuminating Spirit:

Jesus anticipates the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit when he says in today’s Gospel”

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

Here the Holy Spirit is described as the teaching Spirit. When we are receptive to him, he is able to illuminate our minds. Four of the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit have as their purpose this illuminative quality.

They are wisdom, understanding knowledge and counsel.

Wisdom is a gift that allows a person to understand things from God's point of view. In other words, wisdom allows a person to recognize truth. A person with the Gift of wisdom is able to take this truth and use it to glorify God by choosing Godly solutions to problems.

The Gift of Understanding allows a person to comprehend the Catholic Faith. Such a person is receptive to the magisterial teaching of the Church and wants to order their lives in accordance with that teaching because they understand that it is inspired by God.

The Gift of Knowledge allows a person to understand the meaning and purpose God has for him or her and to live up to this meaning. It differs from wisdom in that it is an action, not just a desire to live up to the ways of God. Therefore we could say knowledge is the application of the gifts of wisdom and understanding.

The Gift of Counsel is also known as a Gift of Right Judgment. This Gift allows a person to discern between good and evil or right and wrong and is closely aligned with knowledge.

All of these gifts are ones that illuminate our minds, thus allowing us to exercise in a supernatural way the cardinal virtue of prudence.

Prudence, says the Catechism,

is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it.

“The prudent man looks where he is going,” counsels the Book of Proverbs. Prudence is "right reason in action," writes St. Thomas Aquinas. It is called the charioteer of the virtues because it guides the conscience. When this virtue is illuminated by wisdom, understanding, knowledge and council our lives will be under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit.

The Consuming Spirit

In Romans Paul speaks about the consuming work of the Holy Spirit when he says:

But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Three times in these verses St. Paul refers to the Holy Spirit. Sin's influence in our bodies results in spiritual death. Jesus' death was to have its effect by empowering us to die to sin. How does this happen? When we allow the Holy Spirit to refine us, he then consumes that which is not of God so we can live lives that are growing in the virtues of justice and temperance. The other three gifts of the Holy Spirit aid us in this. They are piety, fortitude and fear of the Lord.

Piety is a desire to serve and worship God out of love, not just duty. A person with

the Gift of Piety has a true love and a real relationship with God.

The Gift of Fortitude is also known as the Gift of Courage. Through this Gift a person is no longer afraid to stand up for God and His truths. A person who has the Gift of Fortitude will stand up for good against evil and is convicted to take a stand when the occasion arises.

The Gift of Fear of the Lord puts God in the proper perspective. A person with this Gift understands the greatness and awesomeness of the Lord. They want to serve Him because of who He is. A person with the Gift of Fear of the Lord understands who they are and why they are here in relationship to God; In other words, everything they are is due to the wonder, love, grace, and perfection of God. They are totally dependent on the Lord as a child is to a parent.

When we allow the Holy Spirit to burn away all that is not of Jesus then we can grow in the virtue of justice. Listen to how the Catechism describes this virtue.

Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the “virtue of religion.” Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good. The just man, often mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor.

This virtue that extends care to others is complimented by the virtue of temperance which allows us to look at ourselves with sober judgment. Of this virtue the Catechism writes:

Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will’s mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable. The temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a healthy discretion.

The Book of Sirach cautions:

Do not follow your inclination and strength, walking according to the desires of your heart.

“Do not follow your base desires, but restrain your appetites

The Warming Spirit:

When we allow for the illuminative spirit and the consuming spirit to work in our lives we will then experience more fully the warming spirit touching our souls with his daily council so that we exude His warmth in how we are living.

We are told in the reading from Acts that the Apostles were all together in one place and of one accord. This means they had a common mind that was informed by the mind of the Spirit. But such oneness did not take away from their diversity. For we are told all those who were in Jerusalem heard the Apostles declaring the mighty works of God in their native languages.

When we allow for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives there is a beautiful thing that happens. Our collective life touches others with the warmth and love of Jesus so that they notice. There is a coming together of people whose lives are marked by prudence, justice and temperance. Such lives speak of another – the Holy Spirit - whose presence draws others in as does a camp fire on a cool summer night.

To live our lives where the illuminative Spirit is helping us to grow in wisdom, understanding, knowledge and counsel allows for our minds to be transformed so we think like Jesus. To allow the consuming Spirit to touch our bodies so that in the flesh we die to sin allows for our bodies to be transformed so that we live like Jesus. All of this is in the service of becoming a community that exudes in our collective soul a warmth that allows us to love like Jesus.

Let us pray.

Come illuminating Holy Spirit and transform our minds.
Come consuming Holy Spirit and transform our bodies.
Come warming Holy Spirit and transform our souls.
Come Holy Spirit so that we may think, live and love like Jesus!