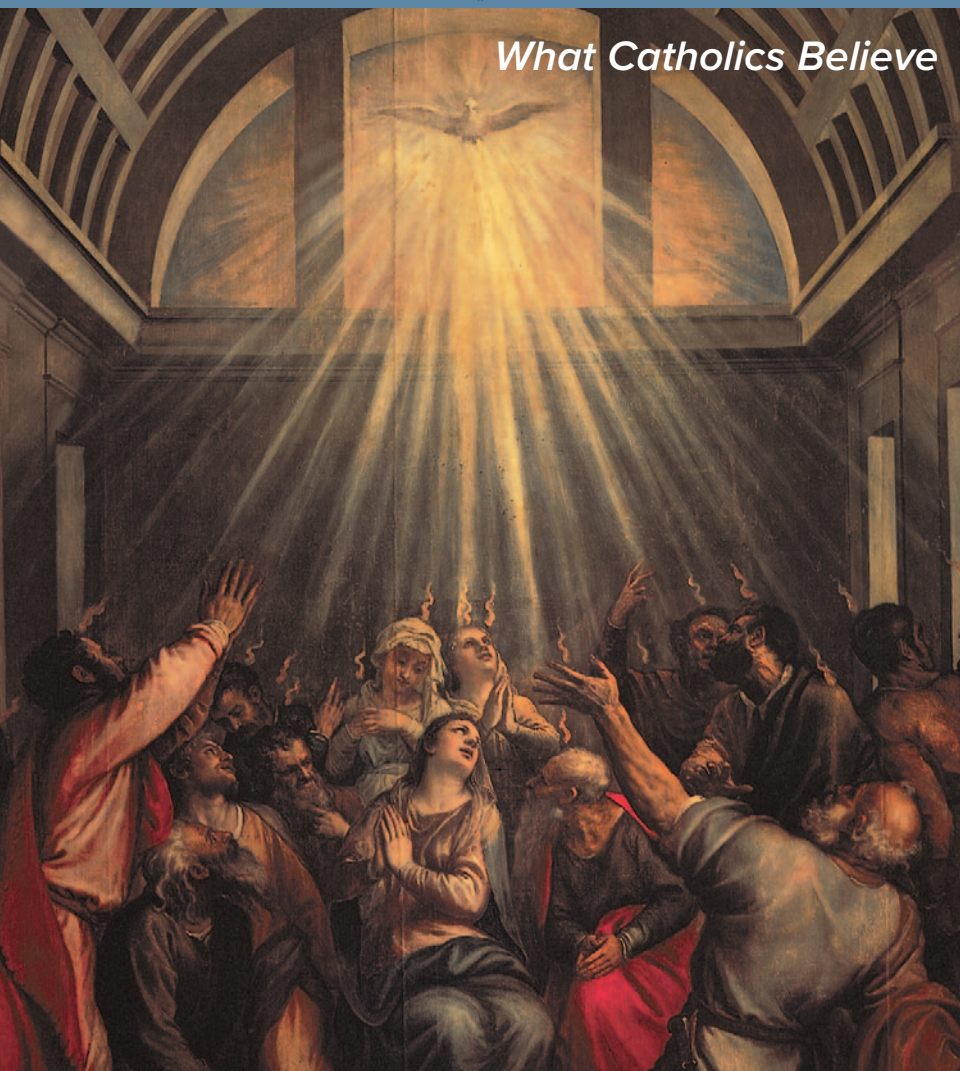




*What Catholics Believe*



Section 6:

*The Holy Spirit*



*To Luke E. Hart, exemplary evangelizer and Supreme Knight from 1953-64, the Knights of Columbus dedicates this Series with affection and gratitude.*

*The Knights of Columbus presents  
The Luke E. Hart Series  
Basic Elements of the Catholic Faith*

# THE HOLY SPIRIT

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PART ONE • SECTION SIX OF  
CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY

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*What does a Catholic believe?  
How does a Catholic worship?  
How does a Catholic live?*

Based on the  
*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

*by  
Peter Kreeft*

General Editor  
Father John A. Farren, O.P.  
Catholic Information Service  
Knights of Columbus Supreme Council

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Knights of Columbus Supreme Council  
PO Box 1971  
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[cis@kofc.org](mailto:cis@kofc.org)  
203-752-4267  
800-735-4605 fax

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## A WORD ABOUT THIS SERIES

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This booklet is one of a series of 30 that offer a colloquial expression of major elements of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Pope John Paul II, under whose authority the *Catechism* was first released in 1992, urged such versions so that each people and each culture can appropriate its content as its own.

The booklets are not a substitute for the *Catechism*, but are offered only to make its contents more accessible. The series is at times poetic, colloquial, playful, and imaginative; at all times it strives to be faithful to the Faith.

The Catholic Information Service recommends reading at least one Hart series booklet each month to gain a deeper, more mature understanding of the Faith.



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PART I: WHAT CATHOLICS BELIEVE  
(THEOLOGY)

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# SECTION 6: THE HOLY SPIRIT

## *Introduction*

This booklet, on the Holy Spirit, is in two parts: first the data, then the theology that explains the data.

Christian theology, like science, is based on data; its principles are not up-in-the-clouds abstractions but divinely revealed explanations of human experiences, both past experience in history (especially as recorded in Scripture) and present experience in our own lives. This is true of the Holy Spirit and the doctrine of the Trinity, just as it is true of Christ and the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Therefore we begin with the experienced data: What difference did the Holy Spirit make in the lives of Jesus' disciples and in the life of the Church in the New Testament? What difference does he make in our lives today?

### 1. *The Holy Spirit: the "Missing Person"*

Acts 19 tells a story that could be repeated in most parishes today. Paul the Apostle "came to Ephesus, and finding certain disciples [Christians], he asked them, 'Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?'" (Acts 19:1-2) They had not.

How did Paul know that? Why did he ask that question? What did he sense was missing at Ephesus? Might he ask the same question today if he came to one of our parishes? Did he perhaps find them sincere but vague, good but boring, nice but wishy-washy?

You certainly couldn't use those words to describe the Church of the martyrs, that changed the world. Read Acts and compare the Church there with most of the Church in America today. What makes the difference? The Holy Spirit.

## *2. The difference the Spirit makes solving our "power shortage"*

Saint Paul must have noticed a spiritual power shortage. The Ephesians knew Christ but they did not know his spiritual power in their lives. It was as if they had maps of the road up God's mountain and the vehicle to travel up the road, but not the fuel for it. They had the ideal but not the power to live it. (Does this sound familiar?)

After his resurrection and just before his ascension, Christ told his disciples not to go out and preach his gospel but to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit, because only then would they have the power for this world-changing work (see Acts 1:4-5, 8). They couldn't do divine deeds with only human power. (Neither can we.)

The Kingdom of God could not be built with the tools of men. The Church (visible and invisible) is the Kingdom of God, and God gave her the three power tools we summarize in the three parts of this series: theology, liturgy, and morality; creed, cult, and code; words, worship, and works; dogmas, prayers, and laws; and he supplies the Holy Spirit as the energy for all three power tools. All three are composed of words, and it takes the



Holy Spirit to give them power. “For the Kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power” (1 Corinthians 4:20), the power to transform words into works, ideals into realities, the abstract into the concrete, “lifestyles” into lives, nice people into new people (see 2 Corinthians 5:17).

For the Spirit is not something vague and ethereal and abstract, like “the spirit of the times” or “the spirit of democracy” or “school spirit.” He is a Person. He is Almighty God!

### 3. *The essential difference the Spirit makes: sharing God's very life*

The Eastern churches use the Greek word *theosis* (“divinization”) for the Spirit’s essential work in us: “that you may...become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). He enables us to share in the very life of God himself – not just the ideals or principles of that life, not just God’s “lifestyle,” but God’s life itself, something as real as blood (though not made of molecules, but made of love). This transformation, from merely human life to participating in divine life, is as great a transformation as the ones in the fairy tales from a frog to a prince, or from a wooden puppet to a boy.

This state of our spirit, in which we share God’s own life, is called by various names: “sanctifying grace” or “the state of grace” in Catholic theology, “deification” in Eastern theology, “salvation” in Evangelical Protestantism, and many other names in Scripture, such as “eternal life” (*zoe*, supernatural life), being “born again” as God’s child, being adopted into God’s family, or entering God’s Kingdom. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

#### 4. *The difference the Spirit makes: intimacy*

The word for “spirit” in both Hebrew and Greek also means “breath.” The Spirit is God’s “breath.” What does this word mean?

When we breathe, the air actually enters into our lungs and becomes one with us. When the Spirit comes, he enters into us and becomes one with us.

For this reason, he is not visible as an external object. He is also invisible because he is spirit, not matter, of course. He is within; he is hard to objectify as if he were without. He is too intimate, too close to see. When he is within us, our soul breathes God as our lungs breathe air: it is that intimate. He is like the wind. In fact, that is the image Christ used in John 3. He becomes the very life of our souls. In Saint Augustine’s formula, the Spirit is to our souls what our souls are to our bodies.

#### 5. *The difference the Spirit makes: the world’s amazement*

What did the world call the first Christians? Acts 17:6 tells us: “these men who have turned the world upside down.” Are we doing that today? Why not? Because the world needs it any less today? Or because we have forgotten how?

The word used for the world’s reaction to Christians was the same word used for the world’s reaction to Christ: *thaumadzein* (to be amazed, astonished, wondering). Everyone, friend and foe alike, wondered at Christ. The friends went on from wonder to worshipping him, and the foes from wonder to crucifying him; but both began in wonder. The world sat up and took notice of Christians just as they did of Christ, and the world was polarized by Christians just as it was by Christ (Matthew 10:34-39).

For though his visible body was no longer present, his Spirit was, as the life of his “mystical [invisible] Body,” the Church.

#### 6. *The difference the Spirit makes: a radically new kind of love*

What the world noticed above all was a new kind of love. The New Testament calls it *agape*. It is almost a new word. Greek before the New Testament rarely used the word *agape*, for it meant then only ‘some kind of love,’ not any specific kind. It now got a new, specific meaning: the love Christ showed and lived, to the Cross – and poured out on the world through his Spirit.

This was the kind of love that often led to martyrdom. Christians went to their death with hymns on their lips, forgiving their killers, as Christ had done (Luke 23:34). When the world saw these Christians, they said: “See how they love one another!” Christ had promised exactly that: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Notice that this presumes that Christian love is not the same as any other kind of love, but so distinctive that the whole world will be able to see the difference. It was radical. It was supernatural. It was a miracle – the miracle that converted the world.

The image Scripture uses for this love that “turned the world upside down” is *fire*. The early Christians were on fire with love: the fire Jesus said he came to earth to kindle: “I am come to cast fire upon the earth, and would that it were already kindled!” (Luke 12:49).

#### 7. *The source of agape*

What kindles this fire? The Holy Spirit. All four Gospels distinguish Jesus from John the Baptist, the last Old Covenant prophet, by this: John said, “I baptize you with water, but he who

is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Luke 3:16).

Everyone wants “true love.” “True love” is *agape*, the honest, self-forgetful love of the other for the sake of the other. Everyone responds to this love, everyone admires true love, everyone deeply longs for a relationship of mutual love. Everyone knows that love is the meaning of life, life’s highest value, the *summum bonum*, or greatest good.

But not everyone knows how to get it, where to go to get it. Where does this love come from? (Could there be a more practical question than that?)

The answer is the Holy Spirit. “God’s love has been poured into our hearts *through the Holy Spirit* who has been given to us” (Romans 5:5). Love is the first fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). To get the fruit, you need the plant.

For the Spirit is the very love of God, the love that eternally circulates, like divine electricity, between the Father and the Son. “God is love” (1 John 4:8). God is made of love as the sun is made of sunlight. As the Son is the Father’s Word, or truth (*Logos*), the Spirit is their love. The Son is God’s light, and the Spirit is God’s fire. This is the fire Christ came to earth to kindle among us even now as “the ‘pledge’ or ‘first fruits’ of our inheritance: the very life of the Holy Trinity...” (CCC 735).\*

\*CCC= *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## 8. *The difference the Spirit makes: wisdom*

Another difference the Spirit makes, both to the early Church and today, is wisdom, or understanding. He gives light as well as fire.

This is why the saints understand Scripture so much more profoundly than the theologians. This is why simple minded saints like Mother Teresa seem so smart, and sophisticated scholars so silly, when it comes to understanding the mind of God. For the mind of God can be understood only through the heart of God. The truth of God is understood through the love of God. (The Son of God, the “Word of God,” is understood through the Spirit of God, who is the love of God.)

Thus Jesus says that the way to understand his teaching is to will (love) his Father’s will (John 7:17). The heart leads the head here.

The kind of wisdom the Spirit gives is the kind Christ had (for it is *his* Spirit!): “They were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22). (“Authority,” by the way, does not mean might, but right.)

## 9. *The Spirit and Scripture*

When a Spirit-filled Christian reads the Word of God – the Word this very Spirit inspired – the book seems to “come alive” and “light up” from within itself. This is because its primary Author is really present in the reader, alive, interpreting his own words.

The human writers of Scripture, after all, were only the secondary authors, the instruments. That’s why Scripture has such a wonderful unity, though it was written by many different

authors, with different personalities, issues, problems, presuppositions, limitations, times, places, and situations.

Scripture is “the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17), and the difference the Spirit makes to understanding Scripture is the difference between a sword in a museum case and a sword in the hands of a great swordsman, when it comes alive and cuts to the heart. “For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, or joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:1).

When Christ appeared to his disciples after his resurrection on the road to Emmaus, he explained the Old Testament Scriptures to them, and they said later, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). That fire was the Spirit, and that heart-light still burns, for his Spirit still teaches the saints. Read Saint Augustine, or Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, or Saint Catherine of Siena, or Saint John of the Cross (or a clear and faithful summary of them like *The Fire Within* by Fr. Thomas Dubay) and see whether Scripture does not suddenly light up and ignite under their teaching. Where did they get this wisdom? The same place all the saints did: the Spirit.

#### 10. *How to “get” the Holy Spirit*

Do you want this wisdom? Do you want the wisdom of the saints? Do you want to be a saint? The source is the Spirit. Do you want the love that turned the world upside down? The source is the Spirit. But how do you get the Spirit?

We can't "get" him; we can only let him "get" us. He is God. Only God can give him. Christ gives him. He comes from the Father through the Son.

To whom does God give the Spirit? And what must we do to receive him?

Scripture's answer is scandalously simple – so simple it is hard for us.

"I tell you, ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:9-13).

The Spirit is free. He is God's gift. There is nothing we can do to "get" him, we must simply ask, in faith, like a child trusting his father's love. The same is true of the Spirit's gifts, such as wisdom: we get them simply by asking and believing: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith" (James 1:5-6).

But be careful what you ask for, because God will take you at your word. The Spirit's work is to sanctify, to make saints, and saints are not safe! They are like the One who makes them. God is not safe. Rabbi Abraham Heschel says: "God is not nice. God is not an uncle. God is an earthquake."

## 11. *The Spirit and saints*

Saints are wild. Saints risk everything on God. Saints are lovers: in love with God (and therefore with God's children), on fire with God's fire. That fire is the Holy Spirit.

The meaning of life is to be a saint. "There is only one tragedy, in the end: not to have been a saint" (Leon Bloy). If we are not saints when we die, God will not rest until we are; that's why most of us will probably need Purgatory before Heaven. All Heaven's citizens are saints.

Sainthood is the culmination of God's work in us, the final end of our lives. And this end – sanctification, saint-making – is especially the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Father made this end possible by creating us, and the Son made it possible by redeeming us, and now the Spirit makes actual what the other two Persons made possible.

## 12. *The Spirit and intimacy with God*

The essence of sanctity is intimacy with God, "knowing" God. This is also the essence of eternal life (John 17:3), what we will be doing in Heaven forever. But how? We can know some things about God by our own human reason, but we cannot know God, personally, intimately, without the Holy Spirit. (Many languages, unlike English, have two different words for knowing facts and knowing persons: e.g., *savoir* and *connaître* in French, *wissen* and *kennen* in German.)

Intimacy is the ultimate aim of love. What love seeks is always union with the loved object or person, whether it is ice cream, sports, music, friendship, romance, marriage, or God. And intimacy with us is the ultimate aim of God's love throughout history and throughout our lives.



The Spirit gives us this intimacy. The Spirit moves us to call God our “Father:” “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:15-16). *Abba* is the intimate Aramaic word for “Father.” Our equivalent would be “Daddy.” Jesus called God *Abba* (Mark 14:36), and so can we. We can have something of the same intimacy with God the Father that God the Son had! How? Through God the Holy Spirit.

And God wants all his children to have this intimacy through this Spirit. This is not an optional extra for super-saints; this is part of the basic “package deal” of being a Christian: “Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (Romans 8:9). And God wants more for us than just *having* the Spirit; he wants us to experience the *fullness* of the Spirit, the “release” of the Spirit, the “baptism” in the Spirit. (The Greek word “baptism” means “immersion,” like a sunken ship in the sea.)

### 13. *The Spirit and prayer*

Because of this intimacy with God, prayer (talking with God) becomes as natural as breathing. The Spirit moves us to talk with the infinitely perfect Creator as we talk with our own closest friend. We want to pray, because we want to be in the presence of the One we love. Love replaces fear or duty as the motive for prayer (and for obedience, too). Of course we will still have problems and temptations and distractions, but they will be the problems of life, not of death. They will be growing pains.

This is true of public, liturgical prayer just as it is true of private, personal prayer. Like Scripture, liturgy too lights up, comes alive, and springs into flame when the same Spirit that taught the Church to compose it, teaches us to enact it.

#### 14. *The Spirit's work in relation to the Father and the Son*

We now turn from experience to theology, from the data to explanation – first of all in time, in “salvation history,” and then in eternity, in the nature of God.

We have seen “Christocentrism” in every part of our faith so far, and we will continue to see it. But this in no way lessens the centrality of the Father and of the Spirit. There is no rivalry in the Trinity, no “either/or,” only “both/and,” as in a good marriage. For Christ has no teaching, or will, or glory of his own, but refers all to the Father (John 6:58; 7:16; 8:50). And the only way we can know Christ is through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). All three must be present, or none is. All three must be active, or none is.

This altruism, or other-directedness, is true both “going down” and “going up,” so to speak: both for God revealing himself to us and for our knowing God.

First, “on the way down.” Christ did not teach on his own authority but on the Father’s (John 5:30-32; 6:38; 7:16). And the Spirit does not teach on his own authority but on Christ’s (John 16:13-14). The Spirit does not glorify himself, he glorifies the Son. The Son does not glorify himself, he glorifies the Father and the Spirit glorifies him. The Father does not glorify himself, the Son glorifies him.

Second, “on the way up,” the *Catechism* tells us that “it is impossible to see [know] God’s Son without the Spirit, and no one can approach the Father without the Son...” (CCC 683). Scripture tells us this too: “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3), and “No one has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (John 3:18).

This is why we must forget ourselves and love others, if we are to be happy: because we are made in the image of the God whose whole life is self-forgetful love. Love “goes all the way up.”

15. *Why the Holy Spirit was revealed last*

“[T]he Holy Spirit is the first to awaken faith in us.... But the Spirit is the last of the Persons of the Holy Trinity to be revealed. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus...explains this progression in terms of the pedagogy of divine ‘condescension’: ‘The Old Testament proclaimed the Father clearly, but the Son more obscurely. The New Testament revealed the Son and gave us a glimpse of the divinity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells among us and grants us a clearer vision of himself. It was not prudent, when the divinity of the Father had not yet been confessed, to proclaim the Son openly and, when the divinity of the Son was not yet admitted, to add the Holy Spirit...’”<sup>5</sup> (CCC 684).

16. *Why it is better for us to have the Holy Spirit than Christ visibly present*

Christ said this: he told his apostles before his ascension, “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor [the Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7).

If Jesus Christ would appear visibly in person anywhere on earth, a billion people would probably come. Yet we have something better than that, according to Christ’s own teaching. We have the Holy Spirit.

But why is this better?

Because the Spirit’s presence to us can be even more intimate than Christ’s. Or, rather, Christ himself can be more intimately

present through his Spirit than he was to his apostles bodily. They knew him better – more intimately and more accurately – after he left them and sent his Spirit. This is clear by comparing the apostles, especially Peter, in the Gospels and in Acts.

The same is true for us. The visible Christ is separated from us by 2000 years of time and 4000 miles of space. We are not first century Jews; we did not see him. The Father is separated even more: he is infinitely transcendent, and “dwells in inaccessible light.” But the Spirit makes Christ known to the eyes of our spirit, as Christ made the Father known to our bodily eyes. The Father is God outside us, the Son is God beside us, the Spirit is God inside us, God haunting us, God “possessing” us. He is maximal intimacy. That is why it is “better.”

17. *The Holy Spirit as the culmination of God's love and plan for us*

This “indwelling of the Holy Spirit” is the culmination of the plan God had for us before the foundation of the world.

“God is love,” therefore all he does comes from his love, his essence.

What love seeks above all is intimacy.

Therefore God seeks intimacy with us.

He reveals himself in three stages of intimacy.

- 1) Throughout Old Testament history, the Father enters into the daily life of his chosen people. He makes noise, like a good parent to his children. He does not keep to himself, but comes out of himself to us. (For love is “ek-static”, “beside itself,” out of itself.)
- 2) In the Gospels, the Son becomes even more intimate; he comes down from Heaven to earth and becomes one of us

– in fact, the lowest. This is as if a parent became a child to become more intimate with his children.

- 3) Yet even that is not enough. He has to get “under our skin.” After Pentecost, the Spirit dwells within us. This is the ultimate goal of love: to get into your beloved’s heart.

This is the ultimate reason for God’s creation of the universe, the reason for each detail of his providence (see Romans 8:28), the reason for the Incarnation, and the reason for the Church. That’s what they are *for!* The universe and the Church are divinely designed saint-making machines. They are bridal chambers.

#### 18. *How the three Persons of the Trinity cooperate to bring us to perfection*

All three Persons act together in all three stages of our destiny.

First, *the Father creates us* – not alone, but by his Word (the Son) (Genesis 1:3) and his Spirit (Genesis 1:2).

Then, *the Son redeems us* – not alone, but by obeying his Father’s will unto death, and by being baptized with the Spirit (John 1:33).

Finally, *the Holy Spirit sanctifies us* – not alone, but by showing us Christ (John 16:14-15) and, through Christ, the Father.

The work of creation is especially “appropriated” to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Spirit. But each Person of the Trinity works with the others:

The Father created us for the Son and for redemption. Colossians 1:16 says that “all things were created [by the Father] through him [the Son] *and for him.*”

The Son redeemed us for the Spirit’s work of sanctifying us. Justification (redemption) was *for* sanctification. He was called Jesus (“Savior”) not only because he would save us from the

*punishment* due to our sins, but “because he shall save his people from *their sins*” (Matthew 1:21).

And the Spirit sanctifies us in order to bring us back to the Father, so that God can be all in all, Alpha and Omega.

### 19. *The Holy Spirit in history*

“When the Father sends his Word, he always sends his Breath [Spirit]. 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 [Colossians 1:15], but it is the Spirit who reveals him” (CCC 689).

“The Holy Spirit is at work with the Father and the Son from the beginning.... But in these ‘end times,’ ushered in by the Son’s redeeming Incarnation, the Spirit is revealed and given, recognized and welcomed as a person. Now can this divine plan, accomplished in Christ, the firstborn and head of the new creation, be embodied in mankind by the outpouring of the Spirit: as the Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting” (CCC 686). These last five articles of the Creed are the Spirit’s work too. All the rest of the Creed belongs to the Holy Spirit. The Creed is totally Trinitarian. It is not Trinitarian plus anything else. The Trinity has no postscripts.

### 20. *Why is the Holy Spirit so hard to know?*

The *Catechism* explains why.

“...[T]he Spirit does not speak of himself. The Spirit who ‘has spoken through the prophets’ makes us hear the Father’s Word, but we do not hear the Spirit himself. We know him only by the movement by which he reveals the Word to us....The

Spirit... 'will not speak on his own.'<sup>8</sup> Such properly divine self-effacement..." (CCC 687) is remarkable. *God* is self-effacing! *God* is humble! How dare we be proud?

Humility, subordination, submission, obedience to authority – this is very unpopular in our secular world, but it is the very life of the Trinity, the nature of God himself. It “goes all the way up.” It is not merely a human virtue, it is certainly not an old-fashioned superstition; it is the nature of ultimate reality.

No man was ever more obedient than Jesus Christ, God incarnate. Since it was not demeaning for God the Son to obey God the Father (they are equals!), it is not demeaning for human equals to obey each other: for children to obey their parents, wives their husbands, or citizens their rulers, as Scripture clearly commands (see Ephesians 5:21-6:9; Colossians 3:18; 4:1, and Jesus' radical words in Matthew 20:20-28). Obedience means something totally different in the Christian life than it means in the world. It does not signify inferiority in any way. Christ was obedient to the Father, but he was equal to the Father in all things. The Spirit is equally divine, yet he is self-effacing. Therefore Scripture's command that some of us obey others “in Christ” in no way signifies inferiority, as it does in the world.

## 21. *Symbols of the Holy Spirit: water, fire, dove*

We cannot speak of the invisible God directly, but only through visible symbols. Three of the most prominent symbols for the Holy Spirit in Scripture are water, fire, and the dove.

“*Water*. The symbolism of water signifies the Holy Spirit's action in Baptism...[J]ust as the gestation of our first birth took place in water, so the water of Baptism truly signifies that our birth into the divine life is given to us in the Holy Spirit” (CCC 694).

Water is the most important element in nature: it is necessary for all life, it was the second thing God created, after light. It is the element most of us naturally love the most. Our favorite vacation spot is the sea. We have a mysterious love of moving water. And some of the great saints, like Saint Teresa of Avila, say it has taught them more than books.

Jesus spoke of the Spirit as “living [moving] water”: “Jesus stood up and proclaimed, ‘If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.”’ Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive” (John 7:37-39).

*Fire.* God revealed himself to Moses in a burning bush. Scripture describes him as “a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). Mystical experiences of him, such as Pascal’s, often take that fiery form.

“[F]ire symbolizes the transforming energy of the Holy Spirit’s actions. The prayer of the prophet Elijah, who ‘arose like fire’ and whose ‘word burned like a torch,’ brought down fire from heaven on the sacrifice on Mount Carmel.<sup>37</sup> This event was a ‘figure’ of the fire of the Holy Spirit, who transforms what he touches.... In the form of tongues ‘as of fire,’ the Holy Spirit rests on the disciples on the morning of Pentecost...”<sup>40</sup> (Acts 2:3-4; CCC 696).

*The dove* symbolizes peace, one of the most precious fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). “When Christ comes up from the water of his baptism, the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, comes down upon him and remains with him”<sup>59</sup> (CCC 701). The Spirit is both fire and peace, both fire and water; paradoxically



opposite symbols from nature must be used to express adequately the One who transcends anything in nature.

## 22. *The Spirit and the Scriptures*

The Nicene Creed confesses that the Holy Spirit “spoke through the prophets.” “By ‘prophets’ the faith of the Church here understands all whom the Holy Spirit inspired...in the composition of the sacred books, both of the Old and the New Testaments” (CCC 702).

On the one hand, this inspiration was not necessarily audible or even verbal (word for word), but on the other hand, it was more than “inspiration” in the common sense of the word, more than a vague help or inclination. On the one hand, the Spirit did not reduce his human instruments to puppets, but spoke through the different personalities, backgrounds, and styles of his human authors; for “grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.” But on the other hand, he insured that their writings (Scripture) would have infallibility and divine authority, so that we can be certain of its truth; for “God can neither deceive nor be deceived.” A sinful and fallible mankind needed no less; and a wise and merciful God provided no less.

## 23. *The Spirit and the Law*

“God gave the law as a ‘pedagogue’ [tutor] to lead his people toward Christ.<sup>73</sup> But the Law’s powerlessness to save man ... along with the growing awareness of sin that it imparts,<sup>74</sup> enkindles a desire for the Holy Spirit” (CCC 708). For without the Spirit within us, we cannot obey God’s Law. Thus Saint Augustine prays, “Give what you command [i.e., give the power, through the Spirit, to obey your command], and then command what you will.”

Augustine also says, “Love God and then do what you will,” for as Christ says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). It is the Spirit who gives us that greatest gift, the gift of loving God.

#### 24. *The Spirit and Mary*

Only one merely human being in history was so “full of grace” and of the Holy Spirit in this world that she was sinless, and perfectly obeyed the “first and greatest commandment,” to love God with her whole heart and soul and mind and strength. Mary is the Spirit’s masterpiece, “our tainted nature’s solitary boast.”

“The Holy Spirit *prepared* Mary by his grace. It was fitting that the mother of him in whom ‘the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily’<sup>102</sup> should herself be ‘full of grace.’ She was, by sheer grace, conceived without sin as the most humble of creatures, most capable of welcoming the inexpressible gift of the Almighty” (CCC 722).

#### 25. *The Spirit and the Church*

The Holy Spirit is to the Church what the soul is to the body. He is the Church’s soul, the Church’s life. The Church is the Body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies too are “temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19) – because we are cells in the Body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit infallibly guided the Church’s earliest ecumenical Councils to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity – including the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Why do Catholics believe in the Holy Spirit? On the authority of the Holy Catholic Church, which teaches it. And why do Catholics believe this Church has infallible authority? Because the Holy Spirit, and not any human spirit, is her soul.

“[T]he Church’s mission is not an addition to that of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but is its sacrament” (CCC 738).

#### 26. *The Spirit and morality*

The Holy Spirit is also the power of our moral life, “... life in Christ, according to the Spirit” (CCC 740). The Spirit gives us both the (long-developing) “fruits of the Spirit” and the (more quickly-given) “gifts of the Spirit.”

#### 27. *The Spirit and the sacraments*

And “[t]hrough the Church’s sacraments, Christ communicates his Holy and sanctifying Spirit to the members of his Body” (CCC 739).

#### 28. *The Spirit and prayer*

The Spirit also teaches us – both through the Church which he ensouls, and individually – to pray and worship. “The Spirit... is the master of prayer” (CCC 741).

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Notes from the Catechism in order of their appearance in quotations used in this section

<sup>5</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio theol.*, 5, 26 (= *Oratio* 31, 26): PG 36, 161-163.

<sup>8</sup> *Jn* 16:13.

<sup>37</sup> *Sir* 48:1; cf. 1 *Kings* 18:38-39.

<sup>40</sup> *Acts* 2:3-4.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *Mt* 3:16 and parallels.

<sup>73</sup> *Gal* 3:24.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Rom* 3:20.

<sup>102</sup> *Col* 2:9.







*“Faith is a gift of God which enables us to know and love Him. Faith is a way of knowing, just as reason is. But living in faith is not possible unless there is action on our part. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to make a decision to respond to divine Revelation, and to follow through in living out our response.”*

– United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 38.

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Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 34  
Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission  
of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World

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Knights of Columbus, Catholic Information Service  
PO Box 1971 New Haven, CT 06521-1971  
Phone 203-752-4267 • Fax 800-735-4605  
[cis@kofc.org](mailto:cis@kofc.org) • [www.kofc.org/cis](http://www.kofc.org/cis)



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