

**The Church of the Good Shepherd**  
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The Holy Spirit has been a neglected subject in Christian teaching through the centuries. Perhaps that is why the Holy Spirit is often misunderstood. For example, some have identified the Spirit with the individual conscience. The Holy Spirit has been identified with the human mind, a view that seems to deny the human freedom to choose or resist the will of God. Some people believe that the Holy Spirit is primarily (or solely) manifested in unusual outer actions such as speaking in tongues, loud noises, gestures, and dancing. In such instances, the Holy Spirit seems to take possession of the individual and completely control one's actions.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Hebrew word *ruah*, meaning "breath", is often used to speak of the Spirit of God. In this way, the writers referred to the nearness of God, involved in nature as well as the life-giving, reforming source of strength, involved with the entire community of nation of Israel and through the messages of the prophets.

The New Testament emphasis on the Holy Spirit takes a slightly different turn. The Holy Spirit is still taken to be God present with us, but the Holy Spirit of the New Testament points specifically to Jesus Christ *after* God has acted mightily in him to bring about redemption for all humankind. The Greek word *pneuma* can mean "breath or wind" but also means "will or soul." In the New Testament we have the record of Jesus' teaching on the Holy Spirit, the experience of Pentecost, and St. Paul's teaching to guide us to an understanding.

So, then, what can we say about the Holy Spirit? What do we mean when we say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken by the prophets?"

**For one thing, we mean that the Holy Spirit creates and renews the Church.** When told that Calvin Coolidge was dead, H.L. Menken is reported to have said, "How can they tell?" Can this be said of the Church? The death of the Church has been prophesied repeatedly throughout history. But, as someone has wisely said, "the first essential of a quiet funeral is a willing corpse" and the Church is anything but a "willing corpse." Behind the failures she shares with every human institution, she represents something life cannot go on without.

At Pentecost, the Spirit was revealed as the One who spoke not only to holy persons but to all persons. The miraculous gift so commonly called "tongues" was actually not a gift of speech at all but one of hearing. Persons heard the gospel in their own language. It was something new. The work of the Holy Spirit infuses something new into the life of the followers of Jesus Christ each time his claim is made significant. The call of the Spirit is always a summons to life in community with other followers of Christ and each birth in the community of the Holy Spirit adds something new to that community.

When there is a baptism, a confirmation, a reception, or a reaffirmation, don't you sense the new-life-giving Spirit at work? Don't you see the Church changing and growing? Don't you realize that God is recreating the Church before your very eyes? Do you get chill bumps every time the Priest asks the parents and sponsors, "Will you by your prayers and witness help this child grow into the full stature of

Christ? How about when the one being baptized is signed with the cross and the Priest says, "...you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever." Or when you welcome the newly baptized, saying, "We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood." In these and in so many other ways, the Holy Spirit creates and renews the Church.

**The Holy Spirit also works by teaching the Church, bringing illumination, understanding, and wisdom to our common life.** Some people are of the mistaken impression that the Holy Spirit does not work in any orderly way or within structure of any kind. This is simply not true. While the Spirit is entirely free, it is not conceivable that the God who ordered this marvelous universe would work in a chaotic and haphazard way to accomplish the divine purpose. This holds true in the way God works in the human intellect. God has given us minds; why would God choose to bypass the mind in dealing with us? Every conceivable breakdown in human intelligence has claimed the Holy Spirit as its inspiration. God sent the Holy Spirit to bring light and order and wisdom and counsel and might and understanding to God's people. The Holy Spirit illumines the mind and enables it to work for God.

It has always been the conviction of the Church that while the Spirit warms the heart, he also inspires the mind in order to make us whole and strong to deal with the forces of evil all around us. And, where the Spirit of the Lord is, committed Christians will be thoughtful people, not easily impressed with an emotionalism that denies the needs for human intelligence and order.

Jesus, at the end of his earthly ministry, facing the cross, promised his disciples that he would send the Comforter, the Counselor, to bind their hearts together in love and to strengthen them in their mission (Jn. 13-17). "When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth (Jn. 16:13). He will come to give direction and to glorify Christ (Jn. 16:14). Luke's gospel tells us that the Holy Spirit was at work in the sending out of the 72 in their mission (Lk. 21) Luke also tells of Jesus' command that they remain in the city until they are "clothed with power from on high" (Lk. 24:49). The Holy Spirit teaches the Church, bringing illumination, understanding, and wisdom to our common life.

**And, the Holy Spirit blesses the Church.** One way the Holy Spirit blesses the Church is by bestowing spiritual gifts upon the members. Spiritual gifts are more than skills or abilities. Those can be acquired. The gifts of the Spirit are not acquired but granted. Most of us spend very little time thinking about our spiritual gifts. There are numerous gifts listed in the Bible. We are, perhaps, most familiar with those listed by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans: "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry in ministering; the teacher in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness" (Rom. 12:6-8). And, those he lists in Ephesians: "But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ...The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:7, 11-13).

**Finally, and perhaps most important of all, the Holy Spirit leads the Church in praise of the Living Christ.** According to St. Paul, no one can say "Christ is Lord" except through the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. It is the movement of the Holy Spirit bearing witness with our spirits and enabling us to magnify Christ as the sovereign. But even that inspiration is not purely for our own private enjoyment. When we are moved by the Spirit we are always moved toward other Christians.

The call to discipleship is always a call to share our relationship with Christ in community with his sisters and brothers. One can be reverent and worship God in solitude. Private devotions are an important part of the Christian life. But how can we avoid the call of the Psalmist? “Come, worship the Lord with me and let us exalt God’s name together.” This is psychological common sense as well as sound Christian doctrine. All our deepest experiences are kept alive and vital by sharing with others in community. The New Testament calls this sharing *koinonia*.

In a service of corporate worship, one feels not only the companionship of the living but also the companionship of those who have gone before. Together as one world-wide, age-long family, we gather around the banquet table and its Host. With all the company of heaven, we sing songs of praise and thanksgiving. All this we do at the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Multitudes would bear witness that in the established discipline of corporate worship, they have found clarification and confirmation of their faith, the reorientation of their lives, the deepening of their spiritual exercises, comfort in trouble, and rekindled zest for creative living.

In a vision, John Bunyan saw a man throwing water on a flame and yet the flame continued to burn. He wondered how it could burn on, until he saw that there was a man behind the door pouring oil on the flame. Jesus promised that his followers would be baptized “with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” And, sure enough, we are told that on the day of Pentecost it was as if tongues of fire came to rest upon the heads of the Apostles. Today, over 2000 years later, despite countless attempts to extinguish it, that flame continues to burn in the heart of the Church and in the hearts of believers everywhere.

Through the community of the baptized, the Holy Spirit touches individual lives. And we are bound together and set on fire and driven to worship through the power of the Spirit at work among us. The Holy Spirit is at work within the Church and always has been. He is renewing the Church, illuminating her mind and enlivening her praise so that she may perform the service to which she is being constantly called and constantly sent.