



From A Bishop's Journal (704)

“Be Sealed with the Holy Spirit, the Gift of God” (3)

On Pentecost Sunday, May 7, 2007, I published a pastoral letter on the beautiful sacrament of Confirmation where we all were given the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We must fathom these gifts, and the lines that follow have only one aim: to rediscover the unceasing presence of the Holy Spirit in us and in his Church.

But Then, Who Is the Holy Spirit?

Scripture tells us that on Easter evening, even though the disciples had locked the doors to the place where they were for fear of the Jews, *Jesus came and stood before them. “Peace be with you,” he said. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. At the sight of the Lord the disciples rejoiced. Then he breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men’s sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound.”*

The Giver of Life

I would like to speak very simply to you, today, about the Holy Spirit; I would like to present him to you and ask you to welcome him once again deep in your hearts. It is the Holy Spirit who fills heaven and earth with his grandeur, his beauty, and all of the wonders of God. God sends forth His Spirit, and everything is created. The Holy Spirit inhabits each one of us from the time of our baptism. He lives in us, though we know very little about him because we do not always take the time to acknowledge his presence in the silence of our hearts. It is the Holy Spirit that you have perhaps learned to recognise as you prepared for Confirmation, as the one whom Jesus promised to send us. The Holy Spirit is the one who, like the wind, blows where he wants, to bring God’s grace and peace to all who sincerely seek him in the truth. The Holy Spirit is the one who, like the fresh breeze, renews our strength when we are beaten down with cares, and who rekindles our faith when we doubt. The Holy Spirit is the one who stirs up the waters of our baptism and shakes up our lives to prompt us to go to the poor, the sick, and the marginalised of society.

How Lucky we Are!

The Holy Spirit allows us to bear in ourselves a world that is more beautiful than the one we inhabit. It is the Holy Spirit who came upon the Virgin Mary and made Jesus our Saviour. The Holy Spirit is the one who came to the Apostles as tongues of fire, and who enabled them to proclaim in every language the wonders of God. The Holy Spirit was the strength of the martyrs and of all the saints. The Holy Spirit presides over the beginnings of the Church, and is at the beginnings of all our Christian communities. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us the strength to love, to give, to forgive, and to pray. The Holy Spirit is God giving us life, he is the “Giver of life.” The Holy Spirit radiates the Father’s love for all of us, in us and around us. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us produce the most beautiful fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, and fidelity. The Holy Spirit is God coming to help us be friends to Jesus.

It is the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised to send us as protector and defender. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us the seven most beautiful gifts.

Inspired Texts

The Bible is composed of 72 books written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. From one end of the Bible to the other, we read about the working of the Spirit, and about how humankind reacted to this action. I would just like to refer to three passages.

God's Marvel

The first text is drawn from the first chapter of the first book of the Bible. It tells us how God created man and woman: *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. God created man in His image, in the divine image He created them; male and female He created them."* He gave them the breath of life, the Spirit, and they were created. God saw everything He had done, and it was good. He marvelled at the sight of man and woman whom He had created, and he still marvels today. He finds us wonderful, we are precious in His eyes, and we mean very much to Him.

I hesitated before giving you the second passage: I hope that you are not too afraid of the dead! The passage is taken from the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 37. The title of the passage is "Vision of the Dry Bones," which is a hope-filled text. I quote this passage to show you that there are no situations in the world that cannot be changed; no family situation, a Church situation, no condition in the world. The Lord can always give life. Ezekiel writes: *"The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he led me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me in the centre of the plain, which was now filled with bones. He made me walk among them in every direction so that I saw how many they were on the surface of the plain. How dry they were! He asked me; son of man, can these bones come to life? "Lord God," I answered, "you alone know that." Then he said to me: Prophecy over these bones, and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God to these bones: See! I will bring spirit into you, that you may come to life. I will put sinews upon you, make flesh grow over you, cover you with skin, and put spirit in you so that you may come to life and know that I am the Lord. I prophesied as I had been told, and even as I was prophesying I heard a noise, it was the rattling as the bones came together, bone joining bone. I saw the sinews and the flesh come upon them, and the skin cover them, but there was no spirit in them. Then he said to me: Prophecy to the spirit, prophecy, son of man, and say to the spirit: Thus says the Lord God: From the four winds, come, O spirit, and breathe into these slain that they may come to life. I prophesied as he told me, and the spirit came into them; they came alive and stood upright, a vast army. Then he said to me: Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They have been saying, Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, and we are cut off. Therefore, prophecy and say to them: Thus says the Lord God: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and you rise from them, O my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land; thus you shall know that I am the Lord. I have promised, and I will do it, says the Lord."* This is a scripture passage that is full of life, and full of hope. The Lord can transform our deaths into wonderful life; He can bring the sun to our darkest days. In the most difficult moments of our lives, in the darkest moments in the life of the Church or society, the Lord can always bring life, and the Spirit.

God's Promise

The third passage is from the Acts of the Apostles, and it refers to Jesus' promise. *"You will receive power, when the Holy Spirit comes down on you; then you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, yes, even to the ends of the earth."* This was the same Holy Spirit who

was given to us at baptism, and given once again at Confirmation, the bishop confirms this extraordinary presence of the Spirit in the baptised; he confirms the Spirit's constant action in our lives.

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