

## **Presentation for Spring Assembly**

### **Introduction**

**In the Alpha series, made famous by Fr. Nicky Gumbel, there is a talk to be given on the Holy Spirit Weekend with the title, “What does the Holy Spirit do?” Though it may have been presumptuous of me, I was not entirely pleased with Fr. Gumbel’s presentation, so I wrote another talk to substitute for his, also to be given at my church when we did a Holy Spirit Weekend, and also entitled, “What does the Holy Spirit do?”**

**I suggest that the Holy Spirit is the least appreciated of the three persons of the Trinity. This is almost certainly because the Holy Spirit is the most abstract, so to speak, of the persons that form the Trinity. We can easily imagine the Father, the Creator. Michelangelo’s painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel contains one of the more famous pictorial images of the Father stretching his hand forth to give life to Adam. Likewise, there are innumerable popular images of Jesus created in a variety of media. Jesus, after all, was a human being, even though he was also God. Therefore, from the babe in the manger to the Savior on the Cross to our Lord bursting forth from the tomb, we can easily wrap our imaginations around Jesus. Not so with the Holy Spirit. Doves and tongues of fire, both of which are symbols of**

**the Holy Spirit, do not inspire most hearts as much as either the Father or the Incarnate Word.**

**If you want more proof that the Holy Spirit is relatively neglected, look at your congregation's attendance on Pentecost. Churches are full on Christmas and Easter, two holy days of immense importance to be sure, but they are relatively empty on Pentecost. Yet in the scheme of salvation history, the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was as essential to the spread of the Good News and the foundation of the Church as was the Resurrection.**

**Let me stress at the outset that I would rather not talk about the Holy Spirit. I would instead that we all experience the Holy Spirit, just as the disciples experienced the Holy Spirit on that first Pentecost. One direct experience of God immediately transports us beyond words. Words, pictures, poetry, paintings of God – be it God the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit -- are but mere symbols of the reality which soars above all symbols. Now we must live with symbols while we still see as through a glass darkly, but one day there will no further need for symbols when we come face to face with God in love.**

**When we think of salvation, we immediately think of Jesus. But I suggest that the Holy Spirit is of equal importance with Jesus in the work of**

**salvation. Without the Incarnation, we would not have the means to be incorporated into the life of God. But, without the Holy Spirit, we not have the means to grow to maturity in that divine life. Indeed, our destiny as Christians is to be united to God through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. We can share in the life of God because of Jesus, but we can only come to the fullness of that life because of the Holy Spirit**

---

**From MORNING PRAYER II, p. 100**

**Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers which we offer before you for all members of your holy Church, that in their vocation and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.**

***SONG - Come, Lord, Your Church on Earth Inspire***

---

**We cannot bootstrap our way into the life of God by our own ability. Jesus alone has made it possible for us to become members of his Mystical Body, and, through our organic union with him, we can share in his union with God. But if Jesus is the vine through which we, the branches, draw life, the Holy Spirit is the soul of the Mystical Body. It is the sap running from the vine to the branches that brings life-giving nourishment that allows the**

**branches to grow and bear fruit. Jesus is the head of the Mystical Body. The Holy Spirit is its vital element.**

**Jesus did not bodily remain with his disciples indefinitely after his Resurrection. For forty days after the Resurrection, he appeared to hundreds of his followers, some several times, and then he turned them loose to carry on his work and disappeared from their sight. But he did not leave them orphans. He promised he would send them the Holy Spirit to be their Counselor, their guide, their teacher, one who would give them courage and wisdom in times of persecution and in their efforts to spread the Good News.**

**Scripture makes it clear that even at Jesus' Ascension, the disciples were still confused about who Jesus was. One disciple asked, "Now will you establish your kingdom," implying that he expected Jesus to establish an earthly reign of justice and peace in accordance with the traditional Jewish view of the Messiah. It was only after Pentecost that the disciples were able to burst forth from the upper room without fear for their own safety and understanding at last why Jesus had first to die and then rise from the dead. Without the Resurrection, the frightened disciples would have returned to their homes and former occupations humiliated and depressed. But without the Holy Spirit, they would never have understood or been able to proclaim**

**the Gospel.**

**Even Jesus himself, the Son of God, the Incarnate Word, waited until he had received the anointing of the Holy Spirit before beginning his public ministry. It is at Jesus' baptism by John that the Holy Spirit descended on Christ, after which he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to fast and pray as preparation for his public ministry.**

**Thus, we see several important roles of the Holy Spirit. First, the Holy Spirit calls us to ministry. Jesus began his public ministry with his anointing by the Holy Spirit just as the disciples began their public ministry after receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Certainly, how we receive the Holy Spirit will generally not be as dramatic as it was at Jesus' Baptism or at the first Pentecost, but we should not be so bold as to press forward in ministry without asking the Holy Spirit to grant us the power and the courage to carry out our ministry, or without first asking the Holy Spirit to lead us into whatever ministry the Holy Spirit would have us perform.**

**But the Holy Spirit does more than simply equip us to begin some ministry. The Holy Spirit guides and directs us as we carry out that ministry. The Holy Spirit did not just anoint Jesus at his baptism. It led him into the desert to prepare him for his public ministry. I suggest that Jesus was**

**continually guided by the Holy Spirit whose gifts Jesus manifests throughout the Gospels.**

**The Holy Spirit did not just start the disciples off on the first Pentecost. The Holy Spirit remained with them. When Peter spoke to the crowds, he was inspired by the Spirit. Time and time again in the Acts of the Apostles we hear of someone being “filled with the Holy Spirit” when he or she witnesses concerning Jesus through works or words.**

**Jesus told his disciples that without him they could do nothing. We might also say that without the Holy Spirit we can do nothing. Paul even declares that no one can even confess that Jesus is Lord except by the power of the Holy Spirit. And so we see that two roles of the Holy Spirit are anointing for ministry and enabling ministry to happen.**

**Frankly, I find this consoling as a priest. At the Ordination of a priest, the bishop calls on the Holy Spirit to make the ordinand a priest. It is not the bishop who makes someone a priest, nor is it the Church granting someone a license to carry out certain rites. It is the Holy Spirit who creates a priest, as it were. Now the Holy Spirit creates the priest at his or her Ordination whether the ordinand is good, bad or indifferent . This action of the Spirit happens if the Commission on Ministry made a mistake in endorsing the**

**candidate for Ordination. So I can call on the Spirit to help me in my work. Indeed, I cannot do my work as a priest without the Holy Spirit, as I will point out in greater depth shortly. But because the Holy Spirit has made me a priest, I can count on the Holy Spirit to help me in my work, if I do not get in the Spirit's way. If God has called you to a particular ministry, you also can have that same assurance that you can count on the Holy Spirit's help if you do not get in the Holy Spirit's way.**

**Does this insure that I will always be successful in my ministry? Not at all, whatever "successful" may mean. First, I remain entirely human and, therefore, fallible, as all humans are. I can hope that Holy Spirit will cover for my mistakes, even when I mistake what the Holy Spirit wants of me. Moreover, even when I am fully in harmony with the Spirit, I cannot compel anyone to do what I believe they ought to do, and I would not do so in any event. Someone, believing he or she is also following God's will, can thwart my best intentions. But God does not require that we succeed, only that we try. If we seek as best we can to be faithful to the Holy Spirit, I truly believe God is pleased with us.**

---

**From MORNING PRAYER, p. 100**

**Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly**

**pray you so to guide us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, buy may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

**SONG - *God, Who All Good Works Inspires***

---

**What else does the Holy Spirit do? Well, we know that there are gifts of the Holy Spirit. How many gifts there are depends on who is doing the counting. For example, Bishop John Howe of Central Florida says there are 32, but admits that others find fewer or more than he does. Some gifts that all would agree are true gifts of the Holy Spirit are tongues, interpretation, healing, faith and prophecy. The gifts of the Spirit are given, as Paul tells us, for the building up of the Body of Christ. That is, they are not given for the personal edification of the one who receives a gift, or because the recipient is particularly holy. Rather, the Holy Spirit gives a gift to a particular person at a particular time and place for a particular purpose. The Body of Christ then and there can profit from the gift. If someone receives a gift of the Spirit and does not use it for the good of the Body of Christ, that person is doing a disservice to the Church.**

**I do stress, however, that gifts of the Spirit are different from innate**

**talents. A talent is part of who a person is, for example, having athletic or musical ability. A gift of the Spirit is, as I noted, a particular ability given at a particular place and time for a particular purpose. It is not a characteristic of the recipient. The recipient merely acts as the instrument by which the Spirit communicates the gift, a gift that is meant for the Church, not the individual.**

**I could, of course, spend a great deal longer talking about the numerous gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, I will just add one additional note about these gifts. In my view they should not be intentionally sought, such as praying for the gift of tongues. Why do I say this? A gift of the Spirit, properly so-called, is given because the Body of Christ needs it at some particular time and place. The Spirit decides what gift is needed and grants it to whom the Spirit chooses, again not to be used for the recipient's advancement, but for the welfare of the Church. Thus, a gift of the Spirit is not generally given for the spiritual growth or sanctification of the one who receives it. It may help the recipient grow spiritually, but that is not the primary purpose the Spirit gives the gift. We can, and should pray for wisdom and courage to follow the Lord wherever he leads and for the welfare of the world and the Church, and also pray for many other "gifts" both for**

ourselves and others, but these gifts are not gifts of the Spirit as Paul speaks about the gifts of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit does, however, teach us about our faith and what God asks of us. The Holy Spirit led Ananias, for example, to accept Paul as a true convert to Christ. The Holy Spirit guided the first Council of the Church at Jerusalem to come to a wise conclusion concerning how converts to Christianity had to relate to the Jewish Law. Indeed, the decree of that first Council at Jerusalem begins, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us,” and then goes on to give the decision of the Council.

The Holy Spirit also prays on our behalf when we ourselves do not know how to pray. As Paul tells us in Romans 8:

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

This teaching is a consolation to me since I often do not know how to pray or what to pray for. Yet, I know I can count on the Holy Spirit to pray in me and for me and through me on behalf of those for whom I am

**committed to pray. I need not depend on my own ability or wisdom or holiness or artfulness. The Holy Spirit covers for my ignorance and weakness when prayer is needed. This does not give me an excuse to be lazy in prayer or to pray less. But I have the freedom to ask the Spirit to help me when I need help, which is most of the time.**

---

**From Prayers for Various Occasions, p. 251**

**Almighty and most merciful God, grant that by the indwelling of your Holy Spirit we may be enlightened and strengthened for your service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen**

**SONG - *Deepest Love***

---

**Although I have mentioned a several of the important roles the Holy Spirit plays in the continuing work of salvation, there are two roles I have not yet mentioned that I believe are so important as to deserve special elaboration. I also believe that the appreciation of these two roles leads to a deeper relationship with God and a richer prayer life. Those are tall claims, but I will try to persuade you that they are true.**

**The first of these central roles that the Holy Spirit plays in the life of the Church and in our own lives is that of transformation. But the**

**transformation here is not simply any sort of transformation. It is a making holy, of bringing into being a new creation in God, of restoring creation to its Creator by effecting a fundamental change that can only take place by the action of God. This transformation cannot take place because we make it happen. It can only take place because God, the Holy Spirit, makes it happen.**

**An example of what I am referring to takes place in the Eucharist. On the altar are common bread and wine. These are offered to God as symbols of both food and creation, but during the Great Thanksgiving, the priest calls on the Holy Spirit to transform these gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ. Note that it is not the priest who effects the transformation of the elements. It is the Holy Spirit. The priest is but a sign of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is the true celebrant at the Eucharistic table, and it is Jesus who sends the Holy Spirit to change mere earthly food into the divine banquet we receive at Communion.**

**Not only are the bread and wine brought to the altar symbols of our common meals, but they can more broadly be taken to represent all creation. The Holy Spirit transforms them from the common into the uncommon, from symbols of our common meals, into the reality of the banquet we will all share**

**in heaven. Consider the words of St. Paul from Roman 8:**

**22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**

**Indeed, Christ has set in motion a process, the process of bringing into being the Kingdom of God, the restoration of all creation to its Creator, a renewed creation more glorious than we can possibly imagine. But it is a work still in progress, not a work completed. And who is carrying this work? Who is bringing about this new creation? It is none other than the Holy Spirit. Just as the bread and wine are transformed by the Holy Spirit into the Body and Blood of Christ, so creation is being transformed, raised into the life of God through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is Jesus Christ, who unites within himself both the created and uncreated orders, who makes this transformation possible, and it is he who sends the Holy Spirit to bring the transformation about.**

**And it is the Holy Spirit working in us, if we open ourselves to the Spirit's work, that transforms us into other Christs. And through our union with Christ, we are plunged more and more deeply into the life of God. It is**

**the Spirit that transforms, but we must be open to the work of the Spirit.**

**One writer, whose name escapes me, wrote that spiritual growth consists of giving God more and more control over our lives. The Holy Spirit knows what must be done to bring us to that purity of intention wherein we love God with all our hearts and minds and souls and strength. We must, therefore, do our best to be sensitive to what the Spirit wants, not necessarily what we want. And though we know that we will often make mistakes, it is the desire to that matters. I truly believe that God honors our intentions, even when we are mistaken. To paraphrase a famous statement of Thomas Merton: If we truly want to love God, we do love God.**

---

**From the Great Thanksgiving, Form D, p. 375**

**Lord, we pray that in your goodness and mercy your Holy Spirit may descend upon us, and upon these gifts, sanctifying them and show them to be holy gifts for your holy people, the bread of life and the cup of salvation, the Body and Blood of your Son Jesus Christ.**

***SONG - Lord, Be My Life***

---

**And so the first of the two most important functions of the Spirit as I see the various roles the Spirit plays in the work of salvation is the transforming power of the Spirit that makes creation new by drawing it more**

**and more in harmony with its Creator just as the Spirit transforms the bread and wine at the Eucharist into the Body and Blood of Christ.**

**The second role of the Spirit I wish to talk about is unity. You have all probably heard the song, “We are one in the Spirit. We are one in the Lord.”**

**St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians:**

**13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.**

**And as he states in Ephesians:**

**4 There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to one hope when you were called- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

**The notion of unity, of oneness, runs like a golden thread through the New Testament. Jesus and the Father are one. The disciples of Jesus are to be one with one another and one with Jesus. St. Paul emphasizes our oneness in the Spirit, our oneness in faith, our membership in the one Body of Christ. But what is it that makes us one and why is this unity so important? And is this unity so important that it might rest as a foundation on which we build our lives in the Lord?**

**We are one in the our membership of the Body of Christ, a Body of**

**which Christ is the head and the Holy Spirit is the soul, the living principle who is also God. This oneness in Christ means more than being members of the same club or citizens of the same nation, or even having the same beliefs. This unity is an organic unity, a unity that a hand or an eye has with the human body. It is through our union with Christ and membership in his Body that we are able, through the basic fact of the Incarnation, to be united to God himself, to claim life in Christ, to be able to say that we are children of God in Christ and heirs of heaven through the Holy Spirit who sanctifies and breathes the life of God into us.**

**This unity with Christ, and through Christ with one another, is deeper than any merely earthly bonds we can imagine. Even unity in marriage is but a sign of our unity with God in Christ. We are truly one in the Spirit and one in the Lord. Just as a hand cannot be at war with a foot in a healthy body, or the eye at war with the mouth, we must recognize that our unity in Christ demands that we ought not to be at war with other members of Christ's body. Our unity in Christ is one of the most profound truths and most powerful mysteries of our faith. In a sense, there is only human being in heaven, Jesus Christ, in whose life we share, and without whose life we cannot hope to see God face to face.**

---

**Prayer from Ministration to the Sick, p. 456**

**As you are outwardly anointed with this holy oil, so may our heavenly Father grant you the inward anointing of the Holy Spirit. Of his great mercy, may he forgive you your sins, release you from suffering, and restore you to wholeness and strength. May he deliver you from all evil, preserve you in all goodness, and bring you to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.**

**SONG - *We Pray, O Lord***

---

**Not only have we received the same Spirit, but we are all temples of the Holy Spirit; that is, God, the Holy Spirit, has mysteriously taken up residence within us because we are members of Christ's Body. But just as Christ is indivisible, and we are all members in the one same Christ, so, too, the Holy Spirit is indivisible. We may each have an individual soul, but, at a deeper level, the level of the living God in us, we are completely one. In a sense, we are more one than if we shared the same soul, for we do, in fact, share the same God.**

**We are bound to one another in God and through God and by God, and we are bound to all members of the Body of Christ in every time and place. Our unity with one another and with all those joined to Christ transcends time and space. Perhaps we do not sense this unity, but it is real nonetheless.**

**And this unity has important implications for our spiritual lives. First, we can now understand what Jesus was saying when he taught that whatever we do, or fail to do, for one of the least of his brother or sisters, we do, or fail to do, for him. Second, as the one Spirit is the sanctifying agent for all of us, we might reasonably conclude that no one is fully transformed until all are fully transformed. And since all human beings are called to follow Christ, whether they know him or not, we might even say that no one is fully saved until all are fully saved. The Kingdom of God is not completely established until all things have been restored in Christ by the power of the Spirit, that is, the potential unity of all things in Christ has become actual.**

**Thus, in my view, the two most important roles that the Holy Spirit plays in our lives is first, that of sanctifier, the one by whose power we are drawn more and more into the life of God. Second, the Spirit is the soul of the Church, the unity within which we all are one. The Spirit binds us in the love of God more closely than any mere friendship or common interests possibly could. We are one with God and with one another at the deepest level.**

**My hope is that this presentation has sharpened your appreciation for the Holy Spirit and what the Spirit does for us, or that it has strengthened you in what you already knew. My prayer is that we all will be filled with**

**and transformed by the Holy Spirit that we become more and more united to God until at last we are so one with God in the fullness of love that we are able to gaze into the face of God and know as we are known.**

---

**Prayer for Pentecost, p. 227**

**O God, who taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: Grant us by that same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.**

**Song - *Softly, the Wind***

---