



Who the heck is the Holy Spirit?

By Trenton Mattingly

Seriously, who the heck is the Holy Spirit? Most people have an idea about God the Father and God the Son, but not much of one when it comes to their more elusive partner in crime, the third person of the Holy Trinity: the Holy Spirit.

In 2008, Pope Benedict XVI even said, “The Holy Spirit has been in some ways the neglected person of the Blessed Trinity.” Think about it: When was the last time you thought of the Holy Spirit as something other than just a flaming dove who happens to show up from time- to- time in the Bible? If this is true for you, you should definitely keep reading to find out all the incredible things you’ve been missing out on!

First things first, as with the Trinity, know that no one can ever fully comprehend the Holy Spirit. Like many things in the Catholic faith, it has an element of mystery to it. I don’t mean the type of mystery where you shrug your shoulders and say, “Hmm, I don’t know.” I mean the type that is definitely understandable, but because of the infinite nature of God, we can’t understand all of it.

After all, if it was possible to fit the entirety of God (or even just one of the three persons of the Holy Trinity) into our little brains, our God wouldn’t be very impressive, would He? This is kind of like being blinded by light. You can know there is a sun, but if there is too much sunlight all at once, you’ll find yourself unable to see much at all. Knowing that we can’t ever fully take it all in should never stop us from trying to see what we can though. God has made our limited minds capable of understanding pieces of His infinite complexity for a reason, and trying our best to discover why can only make us more amazed and in love with Him.

Like Steps in a Dance

The Holy Spirit is love, to put things very simply. I know this answer is cliché and isn’t what you were hoping for, so don’t fret — there’s more. The Holy Spirit is a distinct person of the Holy Trinity, who exists as the communication and personification of the mutual, flowing, and never-ending relationship of love and unity between God the Father and God the Son. This is what the Nicene Creed (the one we say at Mass every Sunday) means when it says the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son.” This is super cool, but also tempting to think the Holy Spirit is just love between the Father and Son. Don’t forget that the Holy Spirit is a distinct member of the Holy Trinity who has existed for all of eternity and plays a big role in the creation of the universe (Genesis 1:2) and bringing about our salvation through Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:18).

Many great theologians and saints throughout history, like St. Maximus the Confessor, have realized how difficult it can be to understanding all of this and managed to come up with an easier way to think of things. They compared the bond between the members of the Holy Trinity to a never ending dance where the Father and Son are the dancers and the Holy Spirit is the structure of the dance they are following. In other words, the Holy Trinity would

easily win Dancing with the Stars. After all, the Trinity has the whole perfection thing going on and has had all of eternity to practice.

Self-Gift

The coolest part about all of this is that the Holy Spirit constantly invites us and encourages us to take part in this dance. Think about Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:13-17. The clouds in the sky open up, the Holy Spirit rockets down to descend upon Jesus, and a voice booms, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." When we are baptized, the heavens may not open up and God may not announce our identity, but the Holy Spirit does descend upon us and make a home inside our souls, and is well pleased with us. Think about how incredible of a gift this is: The creator of the entire universe and everything in it has made a home inside of you. He has made a gift of Himself. Jesus promised us no less in John 14:20. And if the Holy Spirit is inside of us, and if the Holy Spirit is part of the flowing relationship of the Trinity, we suddenly find ourselves swept up in the greatest dance of all time! This love, if we are willing to accept it, slowly changes and transforms our mind and soul to be more aware and accepting of the incredible love of God. As Pope Benedict XVI once advised, "Let us invoke the Holy Spirit: he is the artisan of God's works. Let his gifts shape you!"

Teacher of the Soul and Protector of Truth

Have you ever had a teacher who made a huge difference in your life? The way they taught things just made sense, they were creative in ways you never thought possible, and the advice they gave you, even outside of school work, turned out to be the best advice every time. And, maybe, you still find yourself wanting to ask that teacher for help even when you aren't in their class anymore. In John 14:26, Jesus tells us that this is exactly what the Holy Spirit is like. He expands our soul and our mind to be open to God's graces and guides us in our lives as Christians.

And as a teacher, the Holy Spirit would never lead anyone away from the truth. In fact, take a moment to read Acts 2. The Holy Spirit descended upon the first bishops of the Catholic Church (Jesus' apostles) at Pentecost and, ever since, has guided and protected the members and leaders of the Church from straying too far from the teachings of Jesus Christ. It also served as an inspiration to spread this truth to as many people as possible. This guidance and inspiration has remained with the Church ever since by being passed on from bishop to bishop through the Holy Spirit. With all of this in mind, I challenge you to search for the Holy Spirit's presence in your life. Take advantage of the fact that the Holy Spirit has made a home in your soul and ask Him for guidance in your prayers and day-to-day decisions. If the Holy Spirit has managed to keep a Church full of sinners alive and well for thousands of years, He can definitely work wonders for you.

Trenton Mattingly

I'm from Kentucky and am adamant that it is the best state. I'm really into Catholic theology, angry rock music, and libraries but (mostly) not at the same time. I was once called a bad influence for helping teach a Franciscan friar how to skateboard and am pretty bummed that there isn't a St. Trenton, but hope to change that one day.

Seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are imparted on those who receive the sacrament of confirmation

Jesus was blessed with these gifts by his Father, and those who are confirmed are blessed with these gifts by the Holy Spirit. They supply the spiritual power and strength a person needs to accomplish his or her vocational calling and mission in life.

The bishop asks God to bestow these gifts on the confirmation candidates in the prayer he offers with outstretched hands before the anointing: "Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who brought these your servants to new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, freeing them from sin: send upon them, O Lord, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete; give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and piety; fill them with the spirit of the fear of the Lord."

Wisdom is the ability to exercise good judgment. It distinguishes between right and wrong, seeks and upholds truth and justice, and balances personal good with the common good. It is in touch with reality, demonstrates common sense and is prudent. It often increases as a person advances in years and gains life experience.

Understanding is the gift of intelligence and enlightenment. It is the ability to think clearly; to perceive, comprehend and interpret information; and to have insight and discern meaning.

Counsel is good advice. It is the ability to teach, inform, guide, direct, warn, admonish, recommend and encourage. It is not limited to the giving of advice but extends to the ability to graciously receive it.

Fortitude is an unwavering commitment to God or a proper course of action, and it shows itself as moral strength, courage, determination, patient endurance, long suffering, a resolute spirit, stamina and resiliency.

Knowledge is the ability to study and learn; to acquire, retain and master facts and information; and to put what is learned to good use for constructive purposes.

Fear of the Lord is awe, reverence and respect for God. It acknowledges that everything comes as a gift from God, downplays personal achievement and self-sufficiency, and gladly offers praise, worship and adoration to God.

Piety is personal holiness, and it includes devotion to God, prayer, virtue, goodness, decency, self-mastery, innocence, the avoidance of sin and obedience to God's will.

A person who receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of confirmation must cooperate with these special graces and put them to good use. To fail to do so would be like purchasing a new computer and leaving it in the box or buying a new car and leaving it in the garage. For the computer to work, the owner must plug it in and turn it on. For the car to work, the motorist must put it in gear and drive it. For confirmation to work, the recipient must cultivate the divine gifts by using and applying them, not just occasionally, but consistently throughout each day.

The fruits of the Holy Spirit

In the reception of the sacrament of confirmation, the person receives the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts are not to sit idle or be kept in storage. Rather, they are to be put to good use so they will bear much fruit.

In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul lists the nine **fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control** (Gal 5:22-23). These fruits emanate or proceed from the Holy Spirit and reveal what the Holy Spirit is like. These are the Holy Spirit's character traits. And because the Holy Spirit is a Person of the Most Holy Trinity, and because the three Persons are one, the fruits reveal what God is like. The grace and power of the Holy Spirit give increase to these fruits. A confirmed person cooperates with this grace, and with growth in holiness, these fruits expand and intensify.

Love. Agape love is the highest form of love, love for both God and neighbor. It is selfless, focused on the other person, given freely and gladly without condition or the expectation of repayment, expressed in service, and willing to suffer on another's behalf.

Joy. Joy is an interior contentment that comes from being close to God and in right relationship with others. Joy also comes with speaking and upholding the truth, honesty and integrity in relationships, enduring hardships and decent conduct.

Peace. Peace is the harmony that occurs when justice prevails. It happens when resources are shared equitably, power is used for service, interdependence is fostered, information is shared openly and honestly, the dignity of each person is respected, legitimate differences are tolerated, the disadvantaged receive help, hurts are forgiven and the common good is upheld.

Patience. Patience is the virtue of suffering interruption or delay with composure and without complaint; to suffer annoyance, insult or mistreatment with self-restraint, refusing to be provoked; and to suffer burdens and difficult tasks with resolve and determination. It is also the willingness to slow down for another's benefit, to set aside one's personal plans and concerns, to go at another's pace, and to take whatever time is necessary to address their need.

Kindness. Kindness is a warm and friendly disposition toward another. A kind person is polite and well mannered, respectful and considerate, pleasant and agreeable, cheerful and upbeat, caring and helpful, positive and complimentary.

Generosity. Generosity is a bigheartedness grounded in an abundance mentality. It is unselfish and expresses itself in sharing. It is extended to family and friends, strangers, and particularly those in need, and is offered not only as money, food and clothing, but also as time shared and assistance provided.

Faithfulness. Faithfulness is demonstrated by loyalty to friends, duties performed, promises kept, commitments fulfilled, contracts completed, vows observed and being true to one's word.

Gentleness. Gentleness is sensitivity for another person. It is concerned with another's welfare, safety and security. It is grounded in humility. The approach is careful, tender, considerate, affectionate and mild-mannered, free of all pushiness, roughness or abrasiveness.

Self-control. Self-control is self-mastery regardless of the circumstances, to be in control of one's self rather than to be controlled by temptations, events or other people, especially when under pressure or in times of crisis. It is to remain calm, cool and collected, reasonable and even-tempered; to be alert and conscious, to proceed with caution and prudence, and to avoid an impulse or kneejerk response; to be a moderating influence; and to have the strength and courage to reject evil and choose good.