

The Amazing Work of the Holy Spirit in the Liturgy

*Who makes our birth, brings all to be?
Who breaks the earth, who bestirs the sea?
Sets heart's desire where the wind must go?
Who calls the fire? No one may know.*



Of all the Persons of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is perhaps the most mysterious. Wind, breath, fire, dove? Many images of the Spirit suggest movement and freedom and life. They help us capture a sense of the Spirit as kind and gracious, yet awesome in power. Wind can be a gentle puff of fresh air or a fierce gale. Fire brings the safety of warmth and light, but it can also burn a house down. You don't play with fire!

The Church in the early centuries formally defined the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. The Holy Spirit is not a force but a Person. Equal in majesty with the Father and the Son, the Spirit is worthy of worship. Although traces of the Holy Spirit are seen in the Bible from the beginning, it is the New Testament that reveals the Holy Spirit most fully.

In John 16:7-15 Jesus promises to send the Spirit to be our advocate and guide. The Spirit continues Christ's mission on earth. The Holy Spirit is with us even now, leading and empowering us. The joint mission of the Son and the Spirit is now our mission, the Church's mission. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes it well: "[T]he Church's mission is not an addition to that of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but is its sacrament: in her whole being and in all her members, the Church is sent to announce, bear witness, make present, and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity" (CCC 738).

The Holy Spirit is always leading us into the future. The eschaton, or the "last days," when Christ will come again, is the Holy Spirit's special lookout. Just as the Spirit hovered over the waters in creation, and anointed Jesus for his work of redemption, so the Holy Spirit guides the Church into the future in hope.

We rightly stand in awe before the freedom of God. And we know that the Spirit "blows where it will" (a truth amply demonstrated in the Acts of the Apostles). Yet we also know that the Holy Spirit is trustworthy. The Spirit never contradicts the revelation given in Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Spirit leads us more deeply into that truth.

Our life as Christians, in the Church, is life in the Spirit. In fact, the Spirit's presence is especially intense in the sacraments of our salvation. The Holy Spirit is active in all the sacraments. The three sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—make us who we are through the Spirit.

FROM FONT TO TABLE

It begins with water. The purest and clearest of liquids, water is superbly suited by nature to be the sacramental sign of God's own Spirit—cleansing, restoring, giving, and sustaining life. From the waters of creation to the waters of the baptismal font, the Holy Spirit's amazing, life-giving work is carried out through water.

Anointing with oil, also a sign of the Holy Spirit, follows Baptism, when we receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. The gift of the Spirit in this sacrament strengthens us for mission, and seals the Baptism we received.

Finally, the Holy Spirit is the agent of transformation who, through the words of Jesus spoken by the priest, changes bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. In the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit transforms us too and makes us holy.

FROM EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION TO EVERYDAY LIFE

The Spirit is constantly working within us to make the Mass fruitful for us and for the world. The Holy Spirit prepares us to receive God's Word with faith. The Holy Spirit fills our hearts as we pray and sing; interceding with and for us at all times. The Holy Spirit knits us together in unity, especially during the Communion Rite, but also in the celebration as a whole. Finally, the Holy Spirit strengthens us as we are sent out to live the mission of the Church.

We profess faith in the Holy Spirit in the Creed at Mass, yet our faith in the Holy Spirit is perhaps never better expressed than when we are obedient to the Spirit's promptings in our everyday lives. Discerning the Spirit, responding to the Spirit, and rejoicing in the Spirit are indispensable movements of the Christian life.

We learn how to discern and respond to the Spirit through evangelization and catechesis, but we also develop a taste for this—indeed, a flair for this—by the way we worship. How do we know what is good? What to pray for? How to thank God? How to praise him? The Spirit teaches us these things through the prayer of the Church.

REFLECT

Do you ever think of your heart as needing to be “prepared to receive the Word of God” at Sunday Mass? Boredom, restlessness, and distractions are not something we can simply dismiss or get rid of by force of will power, all on our own. We need the Holy Spirit.

ACT

Listen for the promptings of the Holy Spirit within you this week. It may be that you will be faced with a moral decision, or an unexpected opportunity for doing good, or a crisis you need to manage. Listen, and then act, according to the Spirit. Notice the outcome, for yourself and others. Next Sunday, when you return to the Eucharist, bring your gratitude.

PRAY

Spirit of God, thank you for your amazing work in all the sacraments, but especially in the Eucharist. You enable us to pray, to worship, and to embrace the truth of Jesus Christ. Open our hearts to the ongoing work you wish to accomplish in us, and empower us for our mission in the world.

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