

Confirmation

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ~ Acts 8:14-17

THE DESCENT of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus (see Mt 3:13-17; Jn 1:32-34) was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies saying that the "Spirit of the Lord" would be upon the awaited Messiah (Is 11:2; Is 61:1; Lk 4:16-21). Jesus promised that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit would also fall upon all those who believed in him after he was glorified (see Jn 7:37-39) — a promise that was first fulfilled on Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-4). Soon after Pentecost, the apostles began to lay hands on those who had been baptized so that they might also receive the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:14-17). This practice was later referred to as "Confirmation."

Grace of Confirmation

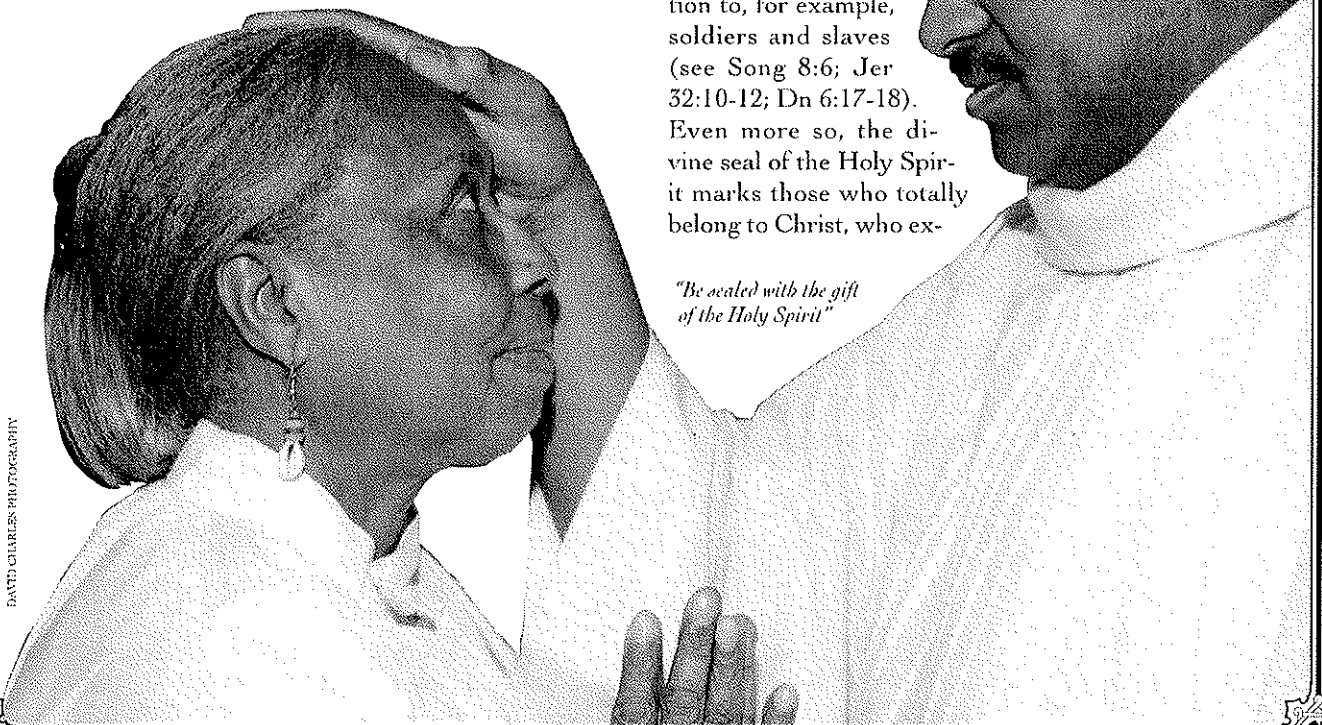
Confirmation, which "confirms" faith, is necessary to complete the baptismal grace, the gift of divine life

"The effect of Confirmation is a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit."

that God intends for every human person. Specifically, the effect of Confirmation is a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This special outpouring of the Holy Spirit imparts an indelible spiritual mark (character). In other words, the effect of Confirmation, like Baptism, can never be erased from

one's soul. The newly confirmed are forever sealed with the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Confirmation may never be repeated. In the Old Testament, a seal marked the property of another, exercised their authority, and assured their protection to, for example, soldiers and slaves (see Song 8:6; Jer 32:10-12; Dn 6:17-18). Even more so, the divine seal of the Holy Spirit marks those who totally belong to Christ, who ex-

"Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit"



DAVID CHARLES PHOTOGRAPHY

ercise the authority of Christ, and are promised his divine protection (see 2 Cor 1:21-22; Eph 1:13; Eph 4:30).

This special outpouring of the Holy Spirit not only completes the baptismal grace but also brings about a closer union with Christ. Through this deeper union, those confirmed share more perfectly in God's life as his children and are more perfectly united with the entire family of God, the Church. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are increased in Confirmation and through them we receive the power to "be not afraid" so that we can spread and defend the Christian faith (see Mt 28:19; Acts 18:9; Heb 13:6).

Requirements of Confirmation

Every person who has been baptized can and should be confirmed in order to effect a completion of baptismal grace. Ideally, adults receive the three sacraments of initiation — Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist — at the same celebration. In the case of a baptized infant, Confirmation may be received by a child when he or she reaches the age of discretion or when there is a danger of death.

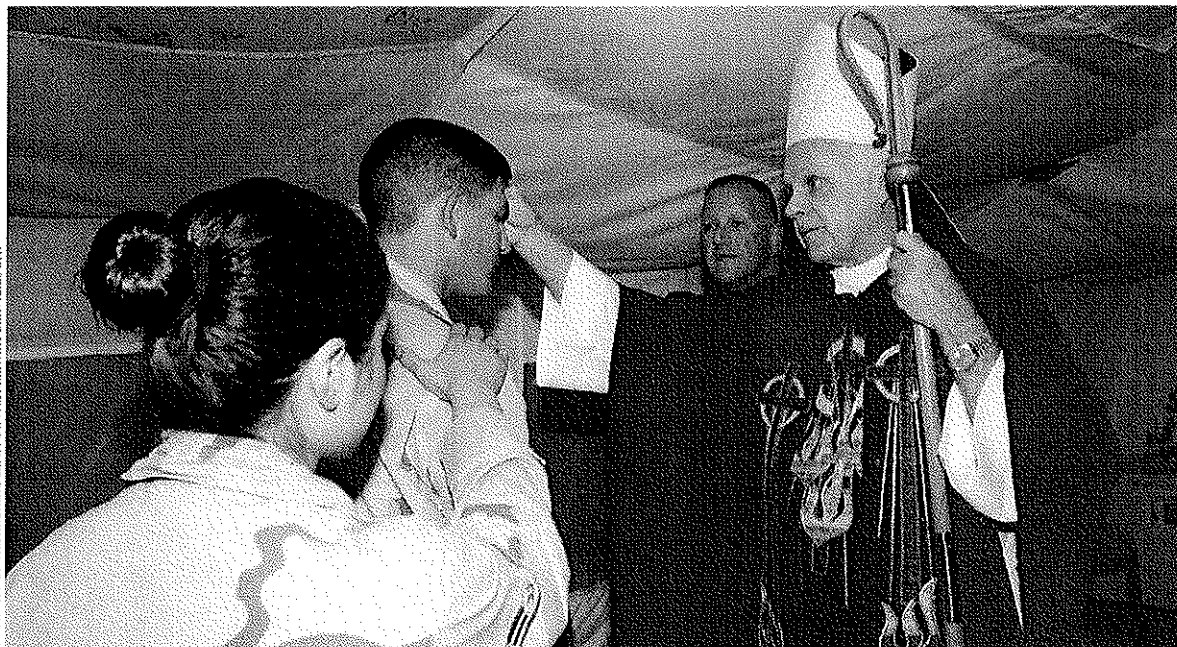
To receive Confirmation, the candidate must profess his or her faith, be in a state of grace (free from mortal sin), and intend to receive the sacrament. Candidates must be prepared to be Christian disciples and to witness every moment of their lives so that they might say, *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"*

(Gal 2:20). Each candidate must also have a sponsor (someone who will assist him or her in living the Christian life). Because of the unity of Baptism and Confirmation, the sponsor is usually one of the baptismal godparents.

The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop, who is a direct successor of the Twelve. The bishop, whose priesthood can be traced back to the apostles, most clearly manifests in his office what this sacrament effects, namely to draw the baptized into a closer union with the Church and her apostolic beginnings. A priest might also confirm, and ordinarily does so on the night of the Easter Vigil, as well as at other times when an unbaptized person enters the Catholic Church or a baptized person is brought into full communion. A priest may also confirm a Catholic seeking to complete his or her initiation, provided that the priest has been given the authority to do so by the bishop or when there is a danger of death. Even when a priest does confirm, the ministry of the bishop is made present in the use of the chrism which has been consecrated by the bishop. (The bishop consecrates all the oils to be used throughout his diocese at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week.)

The Rite of Confirmation

When Confirmation is celebrated at a different time than Baptism (in the case of infant Baptism, for example) the Rite begins with a renewal of baptismal vows to show its connection to Baptism. When



COURTESY OF THE ARCHDIOCESE FOR THE MILITARY SERVICES, USA

Confirmation celebrated in Iraq by Archbishop Edwin O'Brien of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA

“The gifts of the Holy Spirit are increased in Confirmation and through them we receive the power to ‘be not afraid’ so that we can spread and defend the Christian faith.”

Confirmation is celebrated at the Easter Vigil, it immediately follows Baptism, beginning when the bishop or priest invites the faithful to pray saying, “My dear friends, let us pray to God our Father, that he will pour out the Holy Spirit on these candidates for Confirmation to strengthen them with his gifts and to anoint them to be more like Christ, the Son of God” (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* 233).

After this invitation, the bishop or priest then stretches out his hands (a gesture that symbolizes the Holy Spirit) over the candidates and specifically prays for the seven traditional gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, and fear of the Lord (see Is 11:2).

Next, the priest or bishop anoints each of the candidates with chrism and the Sign of the Cross on their foreheads, while he recites the formula, “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit” (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* 234). In Eastern Churches, the candidate’s eyes, nose, ears, lips, chest, back, hands, and feet are also anointed. This anointing and formula constitute the essential rite of Confirmation.

The chrism that is used is most completely understood in light of Scripture. Oil is a sign of abundance and joy and is used to cleanse, limber, heal, and soothe (see Ps 23:5; Ps 104:15; Is 1:6; Lk 10:34). Just as oil gives beauty, health, and strength to the body, so too does the Holy Spirit give these to the soul. The pleasant odor of the chrism symbolizes the fact that those confirmed are “*the aroma of Christ*” (2 Cor 2:15) through whom God “*spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of [Christ] everywhere*” (2 Cor 2:14).

The Power of the Spirit

Familiarity with the actions, gifts, and promptings of Holy Spirit is part of the necessary preparation for Confirmation and is essential to living as a Christian, a child of God (see Gal 4:5-7). The Holy Spirit is the one who reveals God to us. He inspires Scripture and Tradition, guides and protects the Church, and unites the Church both in heaven and on earth, especially in the celebration of the sacraments (see Eph 4:4-5). The Holy Spirit is responsible for the Church’s mission on earth.

Every baptized person has the responsibility to live as a child of God — a task in which the Holy

Spirit constantly gives help through the virtues and gifts infused at Baptism. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, permanent dispositions that make the Christian responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, are increased in Confirmation. Just as “*each tree is known by its own fruit*” (Lk 6:44), so too, is the life of every Christian. Among the fruits of the Holy Spirit are “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*” (Gal 5:22-23). (Based on the Latin Vulgate translation, three more are traditionally included in the list: generosity, modesty, and chastity.) These fruits, which are the first fruits of eternal glory, make it possible to recognize more clearly the presence of the Holy Spirit and are a sign of becoming a true disciple of Jesus (see Jn 15:8, 16).

The Holy Spirit is with us every minute of the day and can guide our actions through his promptings. They are experienced in many different ways, such as a small inner voice, dreams, the words of Scripture, conversations with others, testimonies, prayer, and a sense of knowing the right thing to do. In these ways, the Holy Spirit shows each of us how to live as a child of God. The Holy Spirit reveals sin to bring about repentance and conversion (see Acts 2:37-38), inspires us in what to say in a particular situation (see Mt 10:17-20), and “*helps us in our weakness ... [and] intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words*” (Rom 8:26). In whatever way these promptings are experienced, they assist us in hearing and following the Holy Spirit.

Finally, “*my Spirit abides among you; fear not*” (Hg 2:5). Through Confirmation, our baptismal priesthood — the common priesthood of the faithful — is perfected and we receive the power to “be not afraid” so that we can spread and defend our Christian faith (see Mt 28:19-20; Acts 18:9; Heb 13:6). We have the privilege and responsibility to live more completely as sons and daughters of God, and as his ambassadors to invite others to do the same. Strengthened by the great gifts bestowed — not because of our own merit nor because of the attainment of a specific age or maturity but by the graciousness of God alone — by the sacrament of Confirmation, the Christian may even be required to give the supreme witness of martyrdom.

(CCC 735-736, 1285-1314, 1533, 1830-1832)

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. ~ Isaiah 11:2

ST. PAUL TELLS US that the Church becomes "a holy temple in the Lord ... a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph 2:21-22). St. Augustine, the great Doctor of Grace, adds: "What the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ, which is the Church" (CCC 797). The Holy Spirit works in us through the bestowal of his gifts, which are permanent dispositions that render us able to be obedient to the promptings of his grace. These gifts are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord (some translations of Isaiah, as that shown above, combine the last two; by tradition, however, there are seven).

The Purpose of the Gifts

Each of the gifts of the Holy Spirit has special significance for the soul in its progress toward holiness. **Wisdom** detaches us from the world, and in doing so makes the soul more responsive to the things of God. We have deeper insight into the value of our faith. **Understanding** helps us to grasp more clearly what the truths of our faith really mean to us and our salvation. Understanding enables us to see; it gives eyes to our faith. **Counsel** is the gift that makes us aware of the guidance that the Spirit makes available to us; it helps our conscience distinguish what good to do and what evil to avoid, and helps us choose to do the good. **Fortitude** is the gift of the courage to seek God, who is our goal, and to reject everything that stands in the way of God or bars us from him, including ridicule, malice, and outright persecution by others. **Knowledge** tells us the path of virtue and warns us of the dangers that we face in seeking and attaining Heaven. **Piety** is the confidence in God that a child feels for a lov-

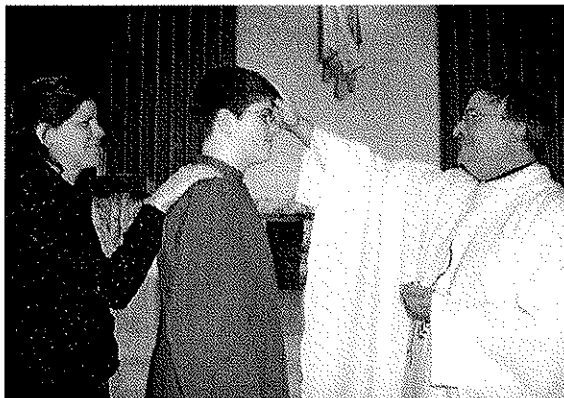
"His gifts render us able to be obedient to the promptings of his grace."

ing parent, so that we can serve our Heavenly Father with joy. Finally, **fear of the Lord** is the solemn respect of God that fills us with a horror and dread of offending him, not because he is a God who will punish us with wrath, but because we would never hurt the one who loves us so completely.

How the Gifts are Related to Each Other

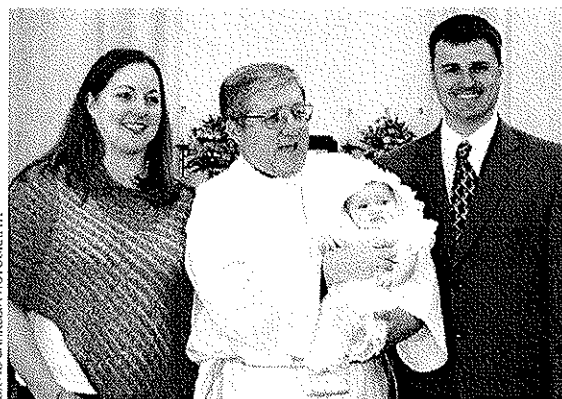
In the Old Testament, these gifts are often linked to each other (see, for example, Jb 28:28; Prv 1:7; Prv 2:6; Prv 8:12-14; Dn 2:21-23), so that one is the beginning or the completion of another. The most significant link is between the gifts that begin and end the list, that is, between wisdom and fear of the Lord. "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" (Ps 111:10). This is not a quaking terror such as that taught by the "hellfire and brimstone" school of preaching. Instead, the "*fear of the Lord is like a garden of blessing, and covers a man better than any glory*" (Sir 40:27). The prophet Isaiah said of the Messiah that "*his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord*" (Is 11:3), and we, too, should take delight in the proper reverence and awe of the God who made us out of love alone: "*The fear of the Lord is glory and exultation, and gladness and a crown of rejoicing. The fear of the Lord delights the heart, and gives gladness and joy and long life. With him who fears the Lord it will go well at the end; on the day of his death he will be blessed*" (Sir 1:11-13).

Fear of the Lord is our "instruction in wisdom" (Prv 15:33); "*wisdom is the fulfillment of the fear of the Lord*" (Sir 21:11). This wisdom is not wisdom as the world understands it, as St. Paul tells us: "*If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God*" (1 Cor 3:18-19). We seek not worldly wisdom, but that bestowed by



The Sacrament of Confirmation is conferred

God himself. In the book of Wisdom, we hear this beautiful hymn to supernatural wisdom: "[I]n her there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent and pure and most subtle. For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. Though she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the man who lives with wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior; for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail" (Wis 7:22-30). The Apostle James also tells us that "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity" (Jas 3:17). Supernatural wisdom is the gift through which we attain the purity of heart that, Jesus tells us, will allow us to see God (see Mt 5:8).



Priest and parents celebrate a newly-baptized child

related to the moral virtue of the same name. Finally, fear of the Lord is akin to the virtue of temperance. Temperance helps us curb our tendency to seek material things that can upset the balance of our priorities, which should put God first as he is the most desirable and lovable. Fear of offending our God by giving emphasis to anything other than

him is a valuable gift that helps keep us on the right path, and prioritizes our efforts to attain true holiness and union with him. To need this gift speaks volumes about the weakness of our humanity, which can so readily slip from the pursuit of our true happiness, which is God.

Effects of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to enable us to grow in the life of grace, to become truly holy. They are given to all the faithful at Baptism, and increased in the sacrament of Confirmation. We become partakers of the special love of the Holy Spirit, who is the sanctifier of the Church. All of these gifts, along with the theological and moral virtues and the fruits of the Spirit, give concrete reality to the effects of being in the state of grace, in friendship with God. To be free of sin is to be truly free — free to approach God, to be united with him and to share his treasures even here on earth. Whoever is in the state of grace has all these wonderful treasures — gifts and virtues — bestowed by a God whose love never ends. We must, however, use our free will to develop these treasures in cooperation with God's grace. And, since "wisdom is justified by her deeds" (Mt 11:19), these gifts show themselves in daily acts of love of God and love of neighbor. These treasures are outpourings upon us of the love of the Holy Spirit, in whom rests the vitality of our spiritual lives and the mission of our holy Mother Church. They are not treasures to be kept in secret, but to create holiness and, as instruments of the Holy Spirit, to renew the face of the earth (see Ps 104:30).

(CCC 797, 1303, 1830-1831)

How the Gifts are Related to the Human Virtues

There is a close relationship between the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the human virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance (see handout on Virtuous Living). The gifts of the Holy Spirit give supernatural value to the human virtues, completing and perfecting them. Understanding, counsel, and knowledge help us see the spiritual value of things, an aid to the virtue of prudence. Piety is related to justice, which renders to others what is due them. Piety gives to God the love and obedience that is due him just because he is our God and is infinitely lovable and deserves our obedience. Fortitude is obviously directly

"These gifts are treasures to create holiness and, as instruments of the Holy Spirit, to renew the face of the earth."

The Holy Spirit

In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. ~ Ephesians 1:13-14

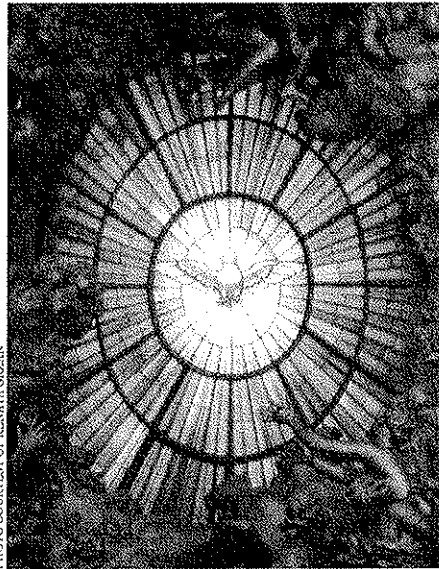
THE HOLY SPIRIT is the third person of the Blessed Trinity. The Father infinitely loves the Son and the Son infinitely loves the Father. The communion of their love is not a power or energy, but a real Person, the Holy Spirit. "God is love" (see 1 Jn 4:8) and the identity of this love defines the person of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord and Giver of Life

Co-equal with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is present in all of God's saving works (see Hg 2:5). The Holy Spirit has been present in this world since the first moment of creation. He is the principle of life, and without him nothing would exist or continue to be. When the "earth was without form and void," it was "the Spirit of God [who] was moving over the face of the waters" (Gn 1:2). Adam did not become "a living being" until God "breathed" his Spirit into him (Gn 2:7). Scripture says: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), which reveals to us that the Holy Spirit is the lord and giver of life. His immanent presence, authorship of life, and signs manifested in Scripture provide the keys to understanding who he is, his role in salvation history, and our relationship with him.

The Holy Spirit in Salvation History

As the story of salvation unfolds in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit is present, guiding the faithful such as Joseph (see Gn 41:38), Joshua (see Nm 27:18), David (see 1 Sm 16:13), and Ezekiel (see Ez 11:24), revealing God and his plan, and preparing the People of God for the com-



Alabaster stone window in the apse of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, dating from the 16th century

ing of Jesus. Because the Holy Spirit authors all life, it makes sense that he is also the one who sanctifies it. Throughout the Old Testament, he is called upon to make things holy and anoint certain individuals, such as David, for a special purpose.

The New Testament also begins with the action of the Holy Spirit. When the angel came to Mary to invite her to become the Mother of God, he told her that "[t]he Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk 1:35), sanctifying her womb and making it divinely fertile. After Jesus' baptism by his cousin St. John the Baptist, he is anointed

by the Holy Spirit (see Mk 1:9-11). It is not until after this anointing that Jesus begins his public ministry. When Jesus opened up the Old Testament to read in the synagogue in Nazareth, he proclaimed, "'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' And he closed the book ... And he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'" (Lk 4:18-21, citing Is 61:1-2). Throughout his public ministry, Jesus promised that all those who believed in him would also receive the Holy Spirit (see Jn 7:37-39).

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to the Church after he ascended into heaven: "If I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (Jn 16:7).

Just before ascending into heaven, he again promised that the Holy Spirit would come in his fullness

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to strengthen the Church (see Acts 1:8). At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell like fire from heaven upon the gathered apostles and disciples (see Acts 2:1-4). He has remained with the Church ever since and will stay with her until the end of time.

It is the Holy Spirit who gives power to the sacraments; without him, they would be empty rituals. It is the Holy Spirit who safeguards the Church and keeps her from falling into error. The Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier, and he mediates his power through the Church, giving her life and vitality. He is always present, and he will never leave because he has been sent by Jesus to be with the Church until the end of time.

Signs and Manifestations of the Holy Spirit

"When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom 8:15). Fostering our relationship with him draws us closer into the communion of God's family as his children. To do that, we need to understand how the Holy Spirit makes himself present to us. What are the signs of his presence and how was he manifested in Scripture? Answers to these questions will help us become more aware of his presence and teach us about our relationship with him.

Signs

Water: This symbol signifies the work of the Holy Spirit in Baptism; as water cleanses the body, the Holy Spirit cleanses the soul from all sin. His presence remains in us as the source of our divine life. *"But whoever*

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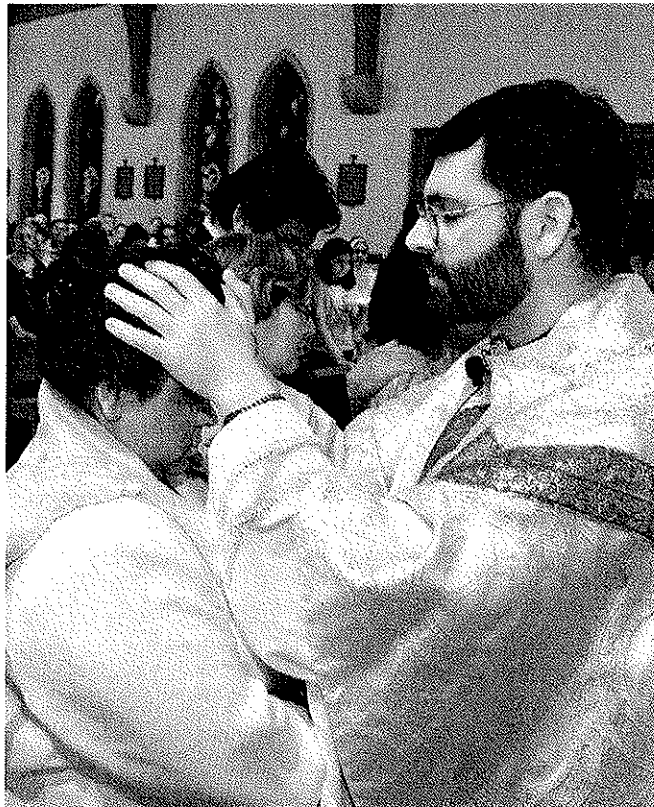
drinks of the water that I [Jesus] shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14).

Oil: In the Old Testament, oil was used to anoint the priests, the prophets, and the kings of Israel. Jesus, the Messiah, was "the Anointed One." In Baptism and Confirmation, oil is used to signify our union with Christ. Christians share in the priesthood of Christ, and in his prophetic and royal mission. *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light"* (1 Pt 2:9).

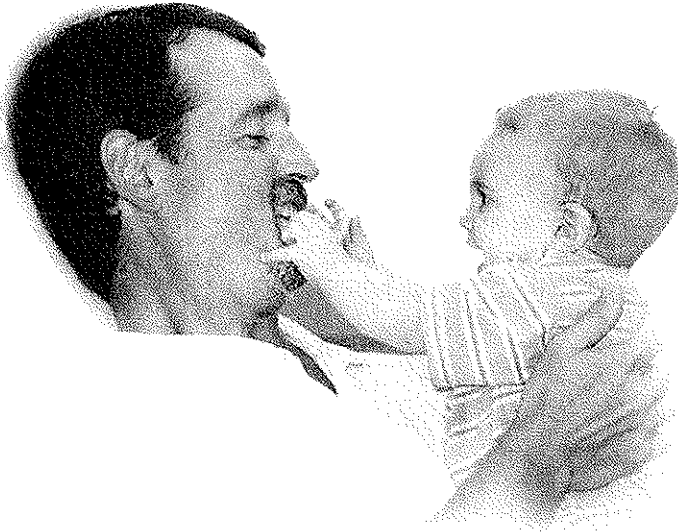
Manifestations

Fire: God led his people Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night (see Ex 13:21). When Israel was tempted to idolatry, the prophet Elijah challenged the priests of Baal to a showdown: the God who answered by fire would be acknowledged as the true God. When the idol-god Baal failed, Elijah commanded the sacrifice to be soaked three times with four jars full of water. Elijah prayed to God and fire came from Heaven and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stone altar, and even the water that had run onto the ground (see 1 Kgs 18:16-40). This is the same "fire from Heaven" that descended on the apostles on the Day of Pentecost. Fire consumes everything it touches. Similarly, anything yielded to the Holy Spirit is caught up into God's life (see CCC 1127).

Wind/Breath: This sign reminds us of the mystery of the Holy Spirit. We cannot ex-



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*“By sending us the Son
and the Holy Spirit,
the Father gave us the
‘best portion’ of all that
he has to give us.”*

perience his presence with our senses, or control his movement by our own will. *“The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit”* (Jn 3:8). The breath of God imparts life to all it touches: Adam and Eve received human life from the breath of God (see Gn 2:7); Jesus breathed on his apostles and they received the Holy Spirit (see Jn 20:22-23). The Holy Spirit inspired (“breathed into”) the Holy Scriptures.

The Dove: The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove at his Baptism (see Jn 1:32). This was a sign given to St. John the Baptist that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. The symbol reminded the Jews of the Great Flood, when a dove sent out by Noah returned with an olive branch as evidence that the waters had receded and the earth was again habitable (see Gn 8:10-11). The dove is one of the most common symbols of the Holy Spirit in Christian art and literature. It speaks to us of the purity and gentleness of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit: Our Guarantee and Hope

In our Baptism, Jesus *“has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee”* (2 Cor 1:22). The Holy Spirit is our guarantee and the reason for why we hope. Jesus promised to send him to the Church after he ascended into Heaven. *“[I]f I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you”* (Jn 16:7). At Pentecost, Jesus fulfilled his promise and the disciples received the Holy Spirit who has stayed with the Church ever since and will stay with her until the

end of time. The Spirit is our hope because he comes to guide us into all truth, convince the world of Jesus, and prove the world wrong about sin (see Jn 16:8-13). Everything that Jesus has, the Father has given to the Holy Spirit for the sake of his Church. He holds all the aces to life’s most difficult situations and cannot be defeated. His presence in our lives is the guarantee and assurance of all that has been revealed and promised to us in Christ.

As a guarantee the Holy Spirit is like a pledge, a first installment of all those gifts that the Father will pour out upon us when we reach Heaven. And not just any gift but the “first fruits” of our inheritance. When Israel was commanded to offer in sacrifice to God the “first fruits” of their crops and livestock, they were giving him the best portion of all that they had. By sending us the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Father gave us the “best portion” of all that he has to give us.

Life in the Holy Spirit fulfills our vocation here on earth. Through the power of the Spirit, *“we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading”* (1 Pt 1:3-4). The Spirit enables us to share in the Kingdom of Heaven here and now. *“[L]ove, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* (Gal 5:22-23) are all fruits of the Spirit and blessed attitudes (or beatitudes) of the saints in Heaven which we share in because of the Holy Spirit. He is the Father’s greatest gift to us.

(CCC 243-245, 484-486, 683-741, 1107, 1699, 2657)