

The Holy Spirit

The Great Unknown

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." (Acts 19:2-4)

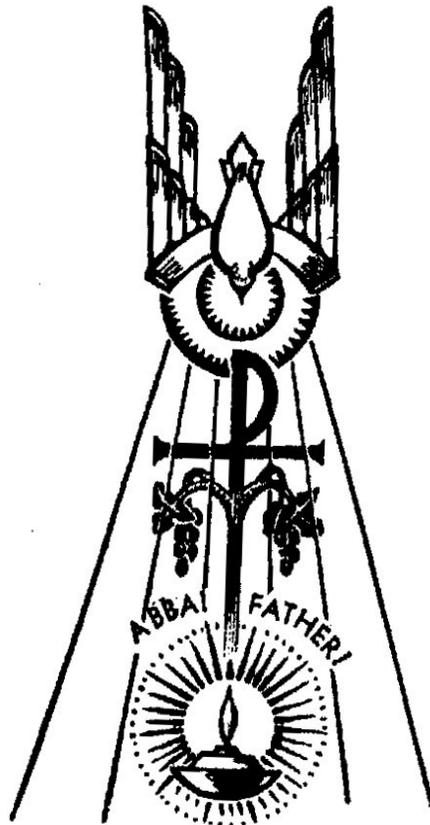
Many modern Christians are little better off than those of Ephesus. Many do at least know that the Holy Spirit exists but little else could be said of Him. It is in this sense that He is the "Great Unknown."

At one level, this is understandable. We can surely relate to Jesus. He took human flesh, and we can have an image of Him. Likewise, the Father, though we have never seen Him, presents us with an understandable image. But the Holy Spirit is hard to imagine. Even the few images Scripture gives (fire, wind, a dove) are hard to relate to at a personal level. Who is the Holy Spirit? How can I understand Him? In the first place He is a Person, one of three persons of the Blessed Trinity. Therefore He is God, God the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Trinity

To understand Him more we might quickly review our understanding of the Trinity. God's knowledge of Himself is infinitely perfect. As God considers Himself as He really is he forms a thought or a word about Himself. This thought is an exact and infinitely perfect representation of all that He is. It is somewhat like when you or I look into a mirror. We see an exact representation of ourselves. But there are important differences from God's perfect image and understanding of Himself. In the first place, the image we see in the mirror

is only an image of our external self. All that lies deep within remains unseen. The second crucial difference is that the image in the mirror is only an image. It is not alive. It is not another "I" who lives. It is only a reflection. But when the Father images or understands Himself it is an infinitely complete and perfect thought. Thus, the thought actually has existence since to exist is of the very nature of God. Hence, any perfect image of Him must also have existence. We call this perfect thought, the "Word" (Jn 1:1) or the Son. Jesus is an absolutely perfect and exact representation of the Father. This is why Jesus is able to say, *He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?* (Jn 14:9-10).



God the Holy Spirit

As the Father gazes upon the Son and the Son upon the Father, they behold the very divine nature which they both possess and behold all which is good and true and perfect. They behold one another in infinite and perfect love. This love is a living love and we call this love the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Blessed Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the Love of God, He is a person, the very love of the Father for the Son and the very love of the Son for the Father. This is why we say in the Creed, *He proceeds from the Father and the Son.*

This then is the first way to understand the Holy Spirit, he is the Love of God. Consider that as we share the life of the Spirit we too are swept up into the love of God. The longing and yearning we have for God flow from this spark of God's own love that dwells in us as in a temple. (1 Cor 6:19)

Perhaps we do well to consider the Holy Spirit under various other titles and images. This will help us understand various aspects of who He is.

His Proper Name

The proper name of the third person of the Blessed Trinity whom we adore and glorify with the Father and the Son is "Holy Spirit." The Church has received this name from the Lord Jesus (Mt 28:19). Spirit translates the Hebrew word *Ruah* which means breath, air or wind. This consideration provides us with a very power image of the Holy Spirit. Air sustains our very being. When we breathe, our chest expands and air flows in to fill the space created. In an almost miraculous way our bodies are able to move the valuable oxygen to literally

every cell of our body and by it every life process is sustained. Without air we die quickly. With air we live and flourish.

It is like this with the Holy Spirit. He is the love, the very life, the very breath of God. He sustains us in every aspect of our being. Scripture speaks of his role from the beginning: *Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.* (Gn 2:7) The life giving breath of God is the Holy Spirit of love. Each time you breathe in think of God's love pouring into your soul, loving and sustaining you. As you exhale recall the words of Scripture:

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words (Rm 8:26).

The Author of our Faith

It is certainly true that God sustains our natural life at every level. It is also true that He does this for our supernatural and eternal life that comes from faith. Here too the role of the Holy Spirit is essential at every level. It is the gift of faith which opens the door to eternal life and it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to have such faith, *No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.* (1 Cor 12:3). Thus God the Holy Spirit is the author and perfecter of our faith. He also draws us into greater love and confidence for the Father:

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with

our spirit that we are children of God (Rm 8:15-16)

Water

Another image for the Holy Spirit is water. Consider just how essential water is for life. Think too how wonderfully water suits itself to the many different needs of all living things. Water enters a tree and produces certain effects. It enters an animal or human being and produces many other effects. Despite these different effects, it is the same water. Thus it is with the Holy Spirit who adapts Himself perfectly to different needs of everyone while Himself remaining unchanged:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit...All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Cor 12:4,11)



Fire

Fire is a transformative energy. Everything which fire touches is effected in very powerful ways. Either it is warmed or it takes up another form, or it is purified. So it is with the Holy Spirit who warms all things by His presence and transforms and purifies all who seek Him. Consider the transformation of the Apostles by the Holy Spirit. Prior to the

outpouring of the Spirit we see men who are silent and afraid. But then, in the upper room, *There appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.* (Acts 2:3-4) These were changed men. No longer cowards they went forth boldly and even gave their lives.

The Dove

The Dove is a symbol of peace and of promise. A dove brought Noah back the olive branch (Gn 8:8) as a sign that the flood was ending. So too did a dove hover above the waters at Jesus' baptism as a sign that the long reign of sin was ending. (Mt 3:16)

Paraclete

Paraclete means "advocate" or "teacher." The Holy Spirit teaches us the ways of God and instructs the Church down through the ages. Jesus told the disciples, *I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth;* (Jn 16:12-13)

Know Him by His Fruits

Jesus gave us the rule that we would know others by their fruits. Since this is the case, learn to know the Holy Spirit by his fruits: *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.* (Gal 5:22) As you experience these fruits know that he is at work within you. He is a gentle but an ardent Spirit. He is the very life and love of God. Without Him we perish but with and through Him all things are possible. *Spirit of the Living God, Fall Fresh on Me.*

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