

*Opening to the Spirit in a New Way*

What exactly is meant by the phrase “baptized in the Holy Spirit?” The word baptism literally means, “to be immersed in, overwhelmed by.” The phrase comes from Scripture. John the Baptist used it (Matthew 3:11), but most notable was Jesus’ usage just before His ascension into Heaven, “John baptized with water, but before many days, you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4). Note that Jesus said this to His Apostles, men to whom He had *already imparted the gift of the Spirit* on the night of His resurrection: “he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:23).<sup>41</sup> Thus, when Jesus told the Apostles to await the “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” He was speaking about something other than an initial imparting - a new outpouring of the Spirit’s graces, one opening their eyes to understand the Jewish Scriptures and empowering them to speak and act boldly in the name of Jesus. The day of Pentecost was the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise. What we need to realize is that God’s desire to work through His Church has not diminished in the least. He is the same “yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

It can be confusing when we speak of the Holy Spirit coming upon us *again* – as if His coming upon us at baptism was incomplete. We can not get “more” of the Spirit; He is a Person after all. When someone comes to my home I do not welcome in just a part of him. “How much of Jim is in your home?” is a nonsensical question. A person could, however, ask, “How much of your home is Jim in?” In other words, is your guest welcome just inside the front door, or is he free to come into the family room, kitchen, bedroom, basement, etc.? In this same way, we can ask how much of ourselves the Holy Spirit has access to. In baptism with water He took up residence in our souls, but have we given Him permission to move about freely within us - in our minds, consciences, speech, bodies?<sup>42</sup> Instead of the term

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<sup>41</sup> From the earliest of times the Church has recognized a true imparting of the Spirit by this action (Council of Constantinople, 389 A.D.). *The Book of Genesis* records God creating humanity by breathing the spirit of life into the clay He had molded. Jesus appropriates that action in His recreation of humanity, breathing His Holy Spirit into the men He spent three years molding and shaping.

<sup>42</sup>Bennet, Dennis, *How to Pray for the Release of the Holy Spirit*, (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing Inc., 1985), p.10.

“baptism in the Spirit,” I find people less confused by phrases like “release of the Spirit,” or “a new openness to the Spirit.”

I say this because these additional “comings” of the Spirit are moments of grace, when our souls yield to his activity in a new way. Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest Christian theologians of all time, wrote:

There is an invisible sending (of the Holy Spirit) also with respect to an advance in virtue or an increase of grace...Such an invisible sending is especially to be seen in that kind of increase whereby a person moves forward into some new act or new state of grace: as, for instance, when a person moves forward into the grace of working miracles, or of prophecy, or out of burning love of God offers his life as a martyr or renounces all of his possessions, or undertakes some other such arduous thing.<sup>43</sup>

In life there are going to be intense moments we can point to, where we know this has happened. At other times we will look back to who we were two years ago and realize how the Spirit has changed us. On the day of Pentecost He was unleashed in the lives of the Apostles; they were graced to the point where they could put themselves completely at His disposal.

#### *Charisms, or Spiritual Gifts*

The gifts of the Spirit are innumerable, sometimes building upon our natural talents. At other times the Spirit may infuse an ability completely foreign to us. One list of spiritual gifts found in the Bible comes from the Apostle Paul. I wish to discuss it here because the gifts (“charisms” in Greek) mentioned are probably unfamiliar to many:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. . .to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit. To another faith by, to another gifts of healing by the one, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpreta-

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<sup>43</sup>Quoted in Schreck, Alan, *Catholic and Christian* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: ServantBooks, 1984), p.107-108.