

## Life in the Holy Spirit

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The question of “life in the Holy Spirit”,  
for us, translates into the question of growth in the spiritual life.

The spiritual life is, most properly, about

- life in the Spirit, in the Holy Spirit
  - being led, in my personal life, in my person, by the Holy Spirit
- Paul says some very powerful, very important things in this regard.

In Romans 8:14, he says

**“Those who are led by the Spirit of God, are children of God.”**

In I Corinthians 12: 3, he says

**“No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”**

In other words, the spiritual life, in the Christian sense, as Jesus intends it,  
is only possible thanks to the Holy Spirit.

We are called to something that transcends human understanding and doing.

The spiritual life is, most properly, about

- participating in the very life of the Third Person of the Trinity, *and thus*
  - participating in the very life of the Trinity
- (for, wherever One goes, Three go!)

Now, we all ask ourselves (on a good day!):

- “How is my spiritual life?”
- “Am I growing spiritually?”
- “Holiness: *are we there yet?*”
- “Where do I stand with Christ?”
- “What exactly *is* the Holy Spirit doing?”

Before we try to answer these questions, however, we might do well,  
to ask, simply, a more fundamental question: “Who is the Holy Spirit?”

Who *is* the Holy Spirit?

Who is this somewhat forgotten divine Person?

It is not always easy to specify who the Holy Spirit is,  
for the symbols used in Scripture to designate and reveal Him,  
although beautiful, do not seem to be very personal.

The Holy Spirit does not seem to have a face...and we like faces!

We like and need to be able to situate persons.  
Often we look upon the Holy Spirit as a power, not a person.  
There are various symbols of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures:  
water, anointing, fire, cloud and light, seal, hand, finger, dove.  
They are very revealing, but it is difficult to be personal with such realities.  
It is difficult to embrace a cloud or fire, to dialogue with a dove.  
We know in faith that these metaphors  
do help us to approach this mysterious Divine Person who transcends us.  
We just need to think deeply and prayerfully to discover how!

The proper name of this Third Person of the Trinity is “Holy Spirit”.  
It might seem that He drew the short straw, or got the raw deal.  
Why?  
Because “holy” and “spirit” are attributes of *all three Divine Persons*.  
So what is the deal?  
Why does He get the generic name?!?!?  
In a sense, the Holy Spirit is the most mysterious of the Divine Persons.  
“Holy Spirit” suggests this.  
There is no imagining “Holy Spirit”.  
There is imagining “Father” and “Son”.  
This is a good thing!  
We must be careful imaging “Father” and “Son”.  
They are infinitely more than we can imagine

Let us very briefly consider the Trinity.  
“Trinity” comes from “trine-unity”: three in one.  
They are not musketeers!  
Musketeers, although very close, are three in three.  
The three Divine Persons are perfectly one.

The three Divine Persons are “understood”—better yet, “situated”,  
by way of processions, of their coming forth.  
(we will not understand until we see God face-to-face.)  
These “processions” occur with-*in* the mystery of God, without disturbing

- the oneness of God
- the absolute simplicity of God

The Second Person comes forth from the First Person  
by way of a procession like that occurring in the mind.  
(we have to work with the analogies we have!)  
When we know, the mind “secretates”, within itself, a concept.

The Third Person comes forth from the Second Person  
by way of a procession like that occurring in the heart.  
When we love, the heart “secretes”, within itself, a secret.

WOW: now that we cleared that up!

The Holy Spirit, according to a famous theologian from the Middle Ages,  
Thomas Aquinas, says that there are two proper names for the Holy Spirit:

**Love and Gift.**

This would require much reflection and theological development.

Let us, for now, ride the coat-tails of this holy brother in Christ,  
and trust his insight.

In the Nicene Creed (325), we profess, regarding Jesus:

“God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.”

It seems to me that we can say regarding the Holy Spirit: “Love from Love”.

The second proper name, “Gift”, in a sense, flows from the first.

God is love.

The Holy Spirit is Love from Love.

Love in God is purely gratuitous, not prompted by anything outside of God.

Love is God “flows” eternally.

“Love has the nature of a first gift.” says Thomas Aquinas

In other words, love, by nature, gives, initiating the gift, unconditionally.

And so, God comes to us, the Holy comes to us, freely.

What Jesus says about the reality of relationship with Him,

is true also of the Holy Spirit.

**In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us.**

(I John 4:17)

**We love because he first loved us.** (I John 4:19)

**You did not choose me, but I chose you.** (John 15:16)

The Holy comes to us, freely, gratuitously.

And we seek to respond.

Life in the Holy Spirit is about our response.

And this response is crystallized, so to speak,  
comes together uniquely and is expressed, in prayer.

Thus, for us, questions about spiritual growth, about life in the Holy Spirit, translate into the question:

- “How is my prayer life?”, *otherwise put*
- “How have my prayer times been of late?”

For although we journey all day,  
in all that we do (again, on a good day!), with the Lord  
(knowing, of course, that He journeys with us at all times, and everywhere;  
“If we are unfaithful, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”

II Timothy 2 :13),

it is in our prayer time,  
when we make deliberate acts of faith, hope, and love,  
that there is a particular awareness and intimacy.

Understandably, then (for better or for worse),  
we evaluate our spiritual life by

- our prayer life
- our prayer times

The question then is: how do we evaluate our prayer life and times?

*What* do we evaluate?

What do we consider?

What criteria do we use in such evaluation?

From what I have observed (and experienced!),  
we very often tend to evaluate our experience of prayer  
like we do our other experiences.

This makes sense, for prayer, in a sense, from a human perspective,  
is *another* experience amongst many that comprise our day.

How do we tend to evaluate our daily experiences?

We tend to evaluate our daily lives, our daily experiences,  
by looking for and trying to measure with  
the emotional impact of these experiences.

Am I right?!?

“That was a terrific party, i.e. I *felt* great.”

“What a great person,

i.e. I *felt* encouraged by and comfortable in his presence.”

“I love my job, i.e. I *feel* productive and needed and free to be myself.”

“This is a good church, i.e. something about it makes me *feel* good.”

“My prayer time this morning was particularly wonderful,  
because I *felt* connected and *felt* very peaceful.”

We *all* think in these terms and along these lines.

We all evaluate, day in and day out, our lives

in great reference to what is happening emotionally.  
Such evaluation is legitimate, but, dare I say, *limited*.

It is limited, quite simply, as regards

- the humanity of our experiences
- the deeper reality of human experience

There are things in human interaction that escape

- the realm of feeling
- emotional “verification”

Such evaluation is *all the more* limited when it comes  
to the One who touches us (the Holy Spirit) in the depths of

- who we are
- our person

Thus, when we say,

“My prayer time this morning was particularly wonderful,  
because I *felt* connected and *felt* very peaceful.”

- we only see a *portion* of the picture
- we only capture *some* of what is truly happening

The point of connection between God and my soul

- is humanly imperceptible
- is touched in faith alone

In other words, I know, *in faith*, that

- there is a connection
- I am *somehow* held by God

But I cannot otherwise tell this.

As stated earlier, it is important for us to realize

that the primary actor/agent in my prayer is *God*, is the Holy Spirit.

Prayer is primarily God’s deal, more than it is another one of *my* activities.

“We do not know how to pray as we ought...

but the Spirit itself intercedes for us in expressible groanings.”

(Romans 8:26)

Consequently, any questions about our growth in the spiritual life

are truly turned towards the Holy Spirit, by whom we have a spiritual life.

In other words, our preoccupation should not be ourselves,

but *the Holy Spirit*.

Spiritual navel-gazing

- is not terribly fruitful
- in the end, is not terribly spiritual

“Come, Holy Spirit” should be our “mantra” or leitmotif of our day.

We do have a human obligation to know ourselves  
so better to live rich human lives,  
and so better to cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

[For there is definitely a cooperation:

“The Spirit bears witness together with our spirit  
that we are children of God”. (Romans 8:16)]

But, the Holy Spirit, nonetheless, is our concern and focus.

Now, real and important questions arise:

- if our spiritual life is primarily the Holy Spirit’s responsibility
- if we cannot readily discern what the Holy Spirit is doing deep inside of us  
how do we know we are spiritually on track?

Hmmm.

The answer is actually very simple,  
too simple for us sometimes to believe: *desire*.

If our growth as children of God depends on the Holy Spirit,  
then we are to

- *desire*
- *want*
- *thirst for*

the Holy Spirit.

Augustine, the north African Bishop who died in 430,  
says the following in his commentary on the Epistle of John:  
**The entire Christian life is in fact an exercise of holy desire.  
You do not yet see that for which you long,  
but the very act of desiring prepares you, so that,  
when God comes, you may see and be utterly satisfied.**

Indeed, we read in Ephesians 6:18:

**“With all supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit.”**

I propose that we can restate this, with all due respect:

**“With all *desire*, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit.”**

Jesus, in Matthew’s Gospel (7:7-9), reveals that the key is desire:

**Ask, and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock,  
and it will be opened to you. For the one who asks, receives.  
The one who seeks, finds. The one who knocks, enters.**

All of this is so simply restated by another spiritual writer,  
a holy sister in Christ, of whom some of you may have heard:  
Therese of Lisieux.

She was a Carmelite nun who died in 1897, at the age of 24,  
from tuberculosis.

In her autobiography, she “defines” prayer as a “surge of the heart.”  
(Manuscripts Autobiographiques, C 25r).

It is all about desire.

She further expresses herself regarding desire  
in these excerpts from her “Act of Offering”, a special prayer she composed,

**O my God, Most Blessed Trinity,  
I *desire* to love You and to make You loved.  
I *desire* to accomplish You Will perfectly,  
and to attain to the degree of glory  
which You have prepared for me in Your Kingdom;  
in one word, I *desire* to be a saint,  
but I know that I am powerless,  
and I implore You, O my God, to be Yourself my holiness.  
The Divine Son, my well-beloved Spouse,  
during His life on earth, told us:  
"If you ask the Father anything in my name he will give it to you."  
(John 16:23).**

**I am then certain that You will hearken to my *desires*...  
My God, I know it, the more Thou wish to give,  
the more do You make us *desire*.  
Immense are the *desires* that I feel within my heart,  
and it is with confidence  
that I call upon Thee to come and take possession of my soul.  
I desire, O Well-Beloved, at every heartbeat to renew this offering,  
This surrender an infinite number of times, till the shadows retire  
(Cant. 4:6) and I can tell You my love eternally face to face!**

And so Augustine and Therese and a host of others reveal to us that  
as we live and grow in the Holy Spirit, our desire intensifies.  
If so, then *our prayer simplifies and is increasingly interior*,  
for desire deepens the heart.

There will always be a need for vocal prayer, because

- we are sentient beings and we need to engage our bodies in prayer
- vocal prayer tangibly engages the community as one body

But, it seems to me that the Holy Spirit

leads us through praise and intercession and thanksgiving  
to silent, interior prayer.

We normally progress in this, in this way.

Growth in the Holy Spirit entails this.

This deeper, more interior prayer can be very challenging.

“Mental prayer” (as is often the translation for silent, interior prayer)

can be a desert, in which the only thing there is,

is the love of God, grace, sustaining our acts of faith, hope, and love.

With praise, intercession, and thanksgiving,

- there is at least something to think about
- the expression is more tangible

Such tangibility we need, and to it we return regularly.

We need our senses, emotions, and imagination touched,

...yet the Holy Spirit leads us beyond these touches.

Recall that there are three types of gifts of the Holy Spirit:

1. *charisms*, mentioned in I Corinthians 14,  
which are for the community, to awaken it  
when it becomes sleepy or grows cold
2. *fruits*, listed in Galatians 5, which are the manifestations  
of the Holy Spirit in a person's life
3. *gifts* properly speaking, listed in Isaiah 11:1-2,  
which are given for the sake of personal holiness,  
to bind us ever more closely to Christ

The Holy Spirit, through His gifts,

takes us deep into the (silent) mystery of God.

If so, then the Holy Spirit leads us to silent, interior prayer:

naked before the Lord

a heart-to-heart

- in the certitude *and darkness* of faith
- in the strength of hope
- in the fire of love

Another holy brother in Christ, John of the Cross,  
a Spanish Carmelite monk who died in 1591,  
has a few choice words about growth in the Holy Spirit:

**What we need most in order *to make progress*  
is to be silent before this great God  
with our appetite and with our tongue,  
for the language he best hears is silent love.**

If I may re-quote Augustine from his commentary  
on the First Epistle of John, and include what follows:

**The entire Christian life is in fact an exercise of holy desire.  
You do not yet see that for which you long,  
but the very act of desiring prepares you,  
so that when God comes you may see and be utterly satisfied.  
Simply by making us wait God *increases our desire*,  
which in turn enlarges our soul,  
making it able to receive what is to be given to us.**

What is given? God, the Holy Spirit, gives *Himself*.

And so, we are in an adventurous relationship  
with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.  
They work in us in perfect concert, yet with a mysterious order,  
which we can only glimpse between the lines.  
The Holy Spirit moves us to enter the mystery of the God-man,  
Jesus the Christ, and together they introduce us into the Father,  
the Source within the Source.

If I may close with a quote from Saint Basil the great,  
a bishop in the early Church, who died in 379,  
a fervent promoter of the Nicene Creed:

**The Spirit is the source of all holiness, a spiritual light,  
and he offers his own light to every mind  
to help it in its search for truth.  
By nature the Spirit is beyond the reach of our mind,  
but we can know him by his goodness.  
The power of the Spirit fills the whole universe.  
Simple in himself, the Spirit is manifold in his mighty works.  
The whole of his being is present to each individual;**

**the whole of his being is present everywhere.  
Though shared by many, he remains unchanged:  
his self-giving is no loss to him.  
Like the sunshine, which permeates all the atmosphere,  
spreading over land and sea, and yet is enjoyed by each person  
as though it were for him alone,  
so the spirit pours forth his grace in full measure, sufficient for all,  
and yet is present as though exclusively  
to everyone who can receive him.  
To all creatures that share in him he gives a delight limited  
only by their own nature, no by his ability to give.**

**As clear, transparent substances become very bright  
when sunlight falls on them and shine with a new radiance,  
so also souls in whom the spirit dwells,  
and who are enlightened by the spirit,  
become spiritual themselves and a source of grace for others.**

**From the spirit comes foreknowledge of the future,  
understanding of the mysteries of faith,  
insight into the hidden meaning of scripture, and other special gifts.  
Through the spirit we become citizens of heaven, we are admitted to the  
company of the angels, we enter into eternal happiness,  
and abide in God.  
Through the spirit we acquire a likeness to God;  
indeed, we attain what is beyond our most sublime aspirations:  
*we become God.***