

The work of the Holy Spirit



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The Reformer of the Church

When St Paul, on his third missionary journey, reached 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 19:1-2). This passage is still relevant today. Many have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit and are unable to respond to the deepest questions of the heart. Who God is, who the Redeemer is, the Holy Spirit, what is sin: these words are foreign to them. Today the faith is a reality unknown to many, and perhaps far from their experience, their work, their daily joys and struggles. Others, then, though convinced of the Holy Spirit's existence, have confused notions. They know that the Spirit of God can confer on some special gifts: for example those of healing, prophecy or praying in tongues (cf. 1 Cor 14). But isn't it dangerous to seek out extraordinary things, the feeling? Isn't the temptation spread in certain settings to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to make oneself important, to grab the attention of others?

When Sacred Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit, it often uses the language of images, that can help us comprehend something of his greatness, of his power, of his action. We cannot see the Holy Spirit with our eyes and we cannot know him by the power of our reason alone. It is only through Revelation that we know he exists. What Scripture reveals of him, through those images and symbols, is summarized in the Profession of Faith with these words: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets”. Jesus not only promised the coming of the Spirit, he also communicated to his disciples the day of the Resurrection as the first paschal gift, and the day of Pentecost as the outpouring of the Spirit on the young Church, gathered together in prayer around Mary. Through the Baptism and Confirmation, we have all received this same Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the first gift of God, that which contains all others. The Holy Spirit is the true reformer of the Church and of each one of us.

Hermann Geissler, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

