



Questions to Consider

- How or when do you pray to, or personally experience the Holy Spirit?
- Would you relate the Holy Spirit to positive changes in the church's faith, morality and best practice?
- How do we know what the Holy Spirit might want us to change, in the Church and in our lives? Is everything open to change?
- Does the Holy Spirit guide us only through the hierarchy, or are all the church's members prompted by the Spirit?
- How can the people's faith (the *sensus fidelium*) be measured or expressed?
- What gifts of the Holy Spirit are most needed in our church, today?

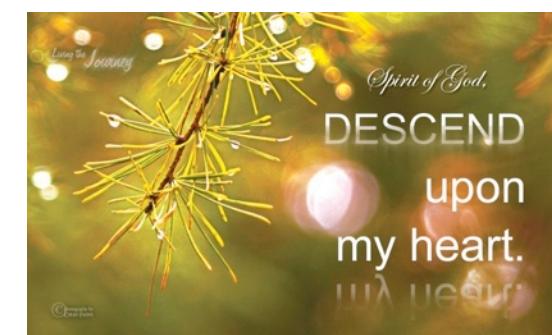


We believe in the Holy Spirit

In the Creed we declare our belief in the Holy Spirit; and in the popular short prayer the "Glory be" we offer praise to the Holy Spirit along with the Father and the Son. Yet it's doubtful if the average Christian pays much personal attention to this "Third Person of the Holy Trinity." Some would say that the Holy Spirit rarely gets a look in, when we are grappling with the issues and problems of life.

What a pity if that were true, since in our faith the Holy Spirit is the finest gift Jesus gives to us, and a personal friend we can always call on in times of need, of helplessness, emptiness or sinfulness. The lovely hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* describes the Holy Spirit as a living fount of energy, of inspiration and of hope.

Those are the ways that – prompted by Jesus and later by St. Paul – the earliest Christians knew and experienced the Holy Spirit, as we can read in so many parts of our New Testament.

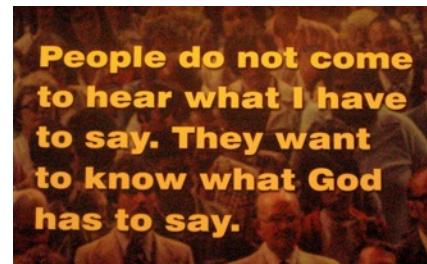


They truly believed and knew that the Spirit was a guiding force in their lives!

If we sometimes wonder how they managed to keep and spread the faith in the pagan and very hostile times in which they lived, the clearest answer is found in St.Paul. He tells us that although we hold the treasure of faith "in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7), still "the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom 8:26).

The Acts of the Apostles could even be called the *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, since it shows so vividly how the Holy Spirit was active in those earliest days . . .

This book fleshes out what Jesus had promised his disciples: "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses." Acts 1:8.



Apart from the well-known story of the Holy Spirit's coming in wind and fire on the first Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13), we can think of other episodes such as how, when he was on trial before the Jewish rulers, St Peter was "filled with the Holy Spirit" when he declared his faith in the resurrection (Acts 4:8). This enthusiasm was felt by the whole group of the disciples, for the text says, "when they had prayed, the place where they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with confidence" (Acts 4:31). Later we find the deacon Philip, and Paul and Barnabas and many others – women as well as men – guided by the Spirit as they went about spreading the message of Jesus.

But the Holy Spirit does not only *guide* and *console* the early Christians; it also shakes and uproots them out of old ways of thinking in order to embrace whatever was needed for the spread of the Church. It was the Spirit that made the apostles widen the circle of leaders and select deacons to serve the poor and the needy (Acts 6:1-6); and later make the more radical change of admitting non-Jews into their community (Acts 10:44-48), and drop the old rules about circumcision and clean-versus-unclean foods (Acts 15:19-20). With the Holy Spirit in charge, it seems that all rules and regulations must be re-appraised and whatever is not helping in our journey towards God can and should be set aside.

Openness to the Holy Spirit calls us and the whole Church to reflect on what changes are called for here and now, in this Year of Faith, to help make more room for God in our lives. If we realise that the Spirit is both the Comforter and the Disturber – for the Spirit blows wherever it will (Jn 3:8) – it helps us know that we belong to God; God does not belong to us! As in the early days, the Spirit is still challenging our Church to reach out to others, to the stranger, the outsider and the alienated. Calling on God's Holy Spirit to guide our Church into the future means being open to surprises and new things. It takes a brave heart – and a brave community – to really trust in the Spirit's guidance, for you never know in advance where you may be led.

A Church that is truly open to the power of the Spirit does not try to preserve itself by clinging to ancient formulae but is ready to dance to the Spirit's melody and venture into pastures new, in faith, hope and love. *Come, Holy Spirit!*