



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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1. The Holy Spirit is “the Lord, the giver of life”. With these words of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Church continues to profess her faith in the Holy Spirit, whom St Paul proclaims as the “Spirit of life” (*Rom 8:2*).

In the history of salvation, life always appears as linked to God’s Spirit. At the dawn of creation, through the divine breath, like a “breath of life”, “man became a living being” (*Gn 2:7*). In the history of the chosen people, the Spirit of the Lord repeatedly intervenes to save and guide Israel through the patriarchs, judges, kings and prophets. Ezekiel vividly portrays the situation of the people brought low by the exile experience as an immense valley filled with bones to which God communicates new life (cf. *Ez 37:1-14*): “And the spirit came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet” (*Ez 37:10*).

It is particularly in Jesus’ history that the Holy Spirit discloses his life-giving power: the fruit of Mary’s womb comes to life “through the power of the Holy Spirit” (*Mt 1:18*; cf. *Lk 1:35*). Jesus’ whole mission is enlivened and guided by the Holy Spirit; in a special way the Resurrection bears the seal of the “Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead” (*Rom 8:11*).

2. The Holy Spirit, equal to the Father and the Son, is the principal agent of that “Gospel of life” which the Church never tires of proclaiming and bearing witness to in the world.

The Gospel of life, as I explained in the Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, is not simply a reflection on human life, nor merely a commandment aimed at raising awareness; it is in fact “something concrete and personal, for it consists in the proclamation of the very person of Jesus” (n. 29). He

makes himself known as “the way, and the truth, and the life” (*Jn* 14:6). And to Martha, Lazarus’ sister, he says: “I am the resurrection and the life” (*Jn* 11:25).

3. “He who follows me”, he proclaims further, “will have the light of life” (*Jn* 8:12). The life that Jesus Christ gives us is a living water which satisfies man's deepest aspirations and brings him, as a son, into full communion with God. This living and life-giving water is the Holy Spirit.

In his conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus foretells this divine gift: “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.... Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (*Jn* 4:10, 13-14). Later, on the feast of Tabernacles, Jesus foretells his Death and Resurrection, loudly exclaiming as if to be heard by people of all places and times: “If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'.... He said this”, the Evangelist John notes, “about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive” (*Jn* 7:37-39).

In obtaining the gift of the Spirit for us by the sacrifice of his own life, Jesus fulfils the mission he received from the Father: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (*Jn* 10:10). The Holy Spirit renews our hearts (cf. *Ez* 36: 25-27; *Jer* 31:31-34) and conforms them to Christ's. Thus the Christian can “appreciate and achieve the deepest and most authentic meaning of life: namely, that of being a gift which is fully realized in the giving of self” (*Evangelium vitae*, n. 49). This is the new law, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (*Rom* 8:2). Its essential expression, in imitation of the Lord who laid down his life for his friends (cf. *Jn* 15:13), is the loving gift of self: “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren” (1 *Jn* 3:14).

4. The life of Christians, who through faith and the sacraments are inwardly united with Jesus Christ, is “life in the Spirit”. Indeed, the Holy Spirit, poured out in our hearts (cf. *Gal* 4:6), becomes in us and for us “a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (*Jn* 4:14).

We must therefore let ourselves be docilely guided by God's Spirit, to become ever more fully what we already are through grace: sons of God in Christ (cf. *Rom* 8:14-16). “If we live by the Spirit”, St Paul urges us again, “let us also walk by the Spirit” (*Gal* 5:25).

This principle is the foundation of Christian spirituality, which consists in accepting all the life that the Spirit gives us. This concept of spirituality protects us from the misunderstandings that sometimes obscure its true nature.

Christian spirituality does not consist in an effort to *perfect oneself*, as if man could further his overall personal growth and achieve salvation by his own strength. The human heart, wounded by

sin, is healed only by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and only if sustained by this grace can man live as a true son of God.

Nor does Christian spirituality consist in becoming “immaterial”, disembodied as it were, without responsible involvement in human affairs. Indeed, the Holy Spirit’s presence in us, far from urging us to seek an alienating “escape”, penetrates and moves our entire being: intellect, will, emotions and bodily nature, so that our “new nature” (*Eph 4:24*) will imbue space and time with the newness of the Gospel.

5. On the threshold of the third millennium, the Church is preparing to receive the ever new gift of that Spirit, the giver of life, which flows from the pierced side of Jesus Christ, in order to proclaim the Gospel of life with deep joy to all.

We ask the Holy Spirit to enable the Church of our time to echo faithfully the words of the Apostles: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us — that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (*1 Jn 1:1-3*).

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I warmly welcome the Bishops of the United States, here for their *ad limina* visit, Cardinal Law of Boston and all the Bishops of the region. I warmly welcome the brothers and sisters from various congregations, and encourage them to make this pilgrimage an occasion for renewed fidelity to their vocation. I extend a special greeting to the pilgrims from the Diocese of Derry in Northern Ireland and I pray that God will bless that region with lasting peace. I welcome the *Ecoforum for Peace* Group from various countries, the Lutheran visitors from Norway and the Swedish Church Study Group. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Ireland, Scandinavia, Canada and the United States of America, I invoke the joy and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ.