



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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1. Jesus' act of "breathing" on the Apostles, which communicated the Holy Spirit to them (cf. *Jn* 20:21-22), recalls the creation of man, described by Genesis as the communication of the "breath of life" (*Gn* 2:7). The Holy Spirit is the "breath" as it were of the Risen One, who instils new life in the Church represented by the first disciples. The most obvious sign of this new life is the power to forgive sins. Jesus in fact says: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven" (*Jn* 20:22-23). Wherever "the Spirit of holiness" (*Rom* 1:4) is poured out, whatever is opposed to holiness, i.e., sin, is destroyed. According to Jesus' word, the Holy Spirit is the one who "will convince the world of sin" (*Jn* 16:8).

He makes us aware of sin, but at the same time it is he himself who forgives sin. St Thomas comments in this regard: "Since it is the Holy Spirit who establishes our friendship with God, it is normal for God to forgive sins through him" (*Contr. Gent.*, IV, 21, 11).

2. The Spirit of the Lord not only destroys sin, but also accomplishes the sanctification and divinization of man. "God chose" us, St Paul says, "from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (*2 Thes* 2:13).

Let us look more closely at what this "sanctification-divinization" consists of.

The Holy Spirit is "Person-Love; he is Person-Gift" (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, n. 10). This love given by the Father, received and reciprocated by the Son, is communicated to the one redeemed, who thus becomes a "new man" (*Eph* 4:24), a "new creation" (*Gal* 6:15). We Christians are not only purified from sin, but are also reborn and sanctified. We receive a new life, since we have become "partakers of the divine nature" (*2 Pt* 1:4); we are "called children of God; and so we are!" (*1 Jn* 3:1). It is the life of grace: the free gift by which God makes us partakers of his Trinitarian life.

In their relationship with the baptized, the three divine Persons should be neither separated — because each always acts in communion with the others — nor confused, because each Person is communicated as a Person.

In reflecting on grace it is important not to think of it as a “thing”. It is “first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us” (CCC, n. 2003). It is the gift of the Holy Spirit who makes us like the Son and puts us in a filial relationship with the Father: in the one Spirit through Christ we have access to the Father (cf. *Eph 2:18*).

3. The Holy Spirit’s presence truly and inwardly transforms man: it is *sanctifying or deifying grace*, which elevates our being and our acting, enabling us to live in relationship with the Holy Trinity. This takes place through the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, “which adapt man’s faculties for participation in the divine nature” (CCC, n. 1812). Thus, by faith the believer considers God, his brethren and history not merely from the standpoint of reason, but from the viewpoint of divine Revelation. By hope man looks at the future with trusting, vigorous certitude, hoping against hope (cf. *Rom 4:18*), with his gaze fixed on the goal of eternal happiness and the full achievement of God’s kingdom. By charity the disciple is obliged to love God with his whole heart and to love others as Jesus loved them, that is, to the total giving of self.

4. The sanctification of the individual believer always takes place through *incorporation into the Church*. “The life of the individual child of God is joined in Christ and through Christ by a wonderful link to the life of all his other Christian brethren. Together they form the supernatural unity of Christ’s Mystical Body so that, as it were, a single mystical person is formed” (Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, n. 5).

This is the mystery of the communion of saints. An everlasting bond of charity joins all the “saints”, those who have already reached the heavenly homeland or are being purified in purgatory, as well as those who are still pilgrims on earth. There is also an abundant exchange of gifts among them, to the point that the holiness of one helps all the others. St Thomas states: “Whoever lives in charity participates in all the good that is done in the world” (*In Symb. Apost.*); and again: “The act of one is accomplished through the charity of another, that charity by which we are all one in Christ” (*In IV Sent.*, d. 20, a. 2; q. 3 *ad 1*).

5. The Council recalled that “all the faithful in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 40). Concretely, the way for the faithful to become saints is that of fidelity to God’s will, as it is expressed to us in his Word, the commandments and the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. As it was for Mary and for all the saints, so for us too, the perfection of charity consists in trusting abandonment into the Father’s hands, following Jesus’ example. Once again this is possible because of the Holy Spirit, who, even in the most difficult moments, enables us to repeat with Jesus: “Lo, I have come to do your will” (cf. *Heb 10:7*).

6. This holiness is reflected in a special way in religious life, in which one's baptismal consecration is lived by the commitment radically to follow the Lord through the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. "Like the whole of Christian life, the call to the consecrated life is closely linked to the working of the Holy Spirit. In every age, the Spirit enables new men and women to recognize the appeal of such a demanding choice.... It is the Spirit who awakens the desire to respond fully; it is he who guides the growth of this desire, helping it to mature into a positive response and sustaining it as it is faithfully translated into action; it is he who shapes and moulds the hearts of those who are called, configuring them to Christ, the chaste, poor and obedient One, and prompting them to make his mission their own" (Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita consecrata*, n. 19).

An eminent expression of holiness, made possible by the power of Holy Spirit, is *martyrdom*, the supreme witness given in blood to the Lord Jesus. But the Christian commitment is already a significant and fruitful form of witness, when it is lived — day by day, in the various states of life — in radical fidelity to the commandment of love.

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

My thoughts and prayers go in a special way this morning to the people of Papua New Guinea who have been struck by the devastating tidal wave. As each day brings news of greater loss, our sense of shock grows deeper and we feel more the need for divine help and human solidarity. May the many dead find peace in the risen Christ, and may those who mourn find strength in the God of all consolation.

I welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially the members of the Congregation of Holy Cross who have come to Rome for their General Chapter and who are here with their newly elected Superior General. May the power of the Lord's Cross always be your strength. I also welcome the group of Salesian Co-operators, and the pilgrims and visitors from Scotland, Nigeria, Taiwan, Korea, Australia, Canada and the United States of America. Upon all of you, I cordially invoke God's blessings of joy and peace.