Good News
INSPIRATION FOR DAILY LIFE

Who is the Holy Spirit?

What are the gifts of the Spirit?
What are the fruits of life in the Spirit?

Until the disciples of Jesus received the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the Third Person of the Trinity had not yet descended to the Earth to dwell here. After Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit came down to be incarnated, so to speak, in all believers — not just the Apostles and not just for special occasions as had happened previously.

God's Spirit has been living with us and dwelling within us ever since.

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Note: In this article, I use the pronoun "he" when referring to this Third Person of the Trinity, but only for the sake of using what's familiar to us and not to cause distractions with the word "she". However, the Book of Wisdom in the Old Testament refers to the Spirit as a "she", and since the Holy Spirit is the Giver of Life and nurtures us like a mother, it's appropriate to think of God's Spirit in feminine terms. But God is neither male nor female; paradoxically, we were made in God's image, which means God is both male and female.

We know that Jesus was born as a man, and using the limitations of human language, he called the first Person of the Trinity "Father". What we are left with, when we want to get in touch with God's feminine side, is the Holy Spirit as a "she". This is a theologically correct understanding, but it is certainly not wrong to continue to call the Third Person a "he."

Who is the Holy Spirit?

It is this Person of the Holy Trinity who forgives sins and sanctifies souls. In the confessional, the priest sits in for Jesus and for the whole Body of Christ, the Church. But absolution is an action of the Holy Spirit. (See John 20:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 6:11.)

The Holy Spirit gives us the love of God, for our benefit and to share with others, even those who are difficult to love. (Romans 5:5)

The Holy Spirit is truth, provides truth, explains truth. (John 14:16-17 and 15:26)

The Holy Spirit dwells in our bodies and sanctifies them (see 1 Cor. 3:16 and 6:19). **Therefore, the Holy Spirit will someday raise our bodies from death** (see Romans 8:11).

The Holy Spirit strengthens our faith. (Acts 6:5)

The Holy Spirit gives us divine wisdom. (Acts 6:3)

The Holy Spirit testifies to Christ, i.e., he confirms the validity of Jesus and his teachings by stirring the hearts of people when they're willing to grow in understanding the faith. (John 15:26)

The Holy Spirit guides us in our work for God's kingdom. (Acts 8:29)

The Holy Spirit inspires us in our roles as prophets or messengers of the kingdom. (Acts 11:28 and 13:9)

The gifts of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the source of graces and gifts. (See 1 Cor. 12:3-11.)

What gifts? There are two kinds: those that sanctify us and those that grant extraordinary favors to help us in our Christian lives and ministries.

The book of Isaiah lists seven sanctifying gifts (Isaiah 11:2-3).

1. **Wisdom:** The wisdom of God is contrary to the wisdom of the world. The Holy Spirit's gift of wisdom helps us detach from the world and cherish only what is of heaven. This wisdom, used in everyday life, is what separates us from our old, pre-converted ways.

2. **Understanding:** What don't you understand about a Church teaching or the ways of faith? Ask the Holy Spirit for understanding. He will enlighten you and gift you with an understanding that makes sense, sometimes quickly and sometimes gradually, to the extent that it's necessary for your salvation and your work for God's kingdom.

3. **Counsel:** Are you ever indecisive or hesitant and full of doubts about your choices? The Holy Spirit guides us and instructs us so that we can make the right decisions. My favorite prayer for this is, "Lord, open the doors of opportunities in the way I should go, and close all doors that lead elsewhere." And he does!

4. **Fortitude:** Getting weary from trials? The Holy Spirit gives us supernatural courage to persist and overcome obstacles and difficulties that arise as we follow Jesus in the mission and in our everyday lives.

5. **Knowledge:** I often wish God would send me a fax that spells out his plans. However, the Holy Spirit is always available to direct us on the paths we should follow, even supernaturally if necessary. He also points out the dangers to avoid and the goals to reach. Listen to the songs, the scriptures, and the people that God puts "coincidentally" into your day. If what they say sounds familiar because the Holy Spirit has already been telling your heart the same thing, trust the message.

6. **Piety (godliness):** From where does our desire come to embrace a life of holiness or to follow Christ in service and ministry? From the Holy Spirit! We are holy because the Spirit of God is holy.

7. **Fear of the Lord:** Once we've been converted, respect for God feels instinctive, doesn't it? That's because it's purely a gift from the Holy Spirit. The more enlivened our relationship with the Spirit is, the more we hate sin, because he is holy and his holiness transforms us.

In 1 Corinthians 12:6-11 (see also 1 Cor. 12:28-31 and Romans 12:6-8) there are nine extraordinary gifts (charismata).

These do not directly aid us in our sanctification, but the Holy Spirit provides them to help us do the will of the Lord in everyday life and in ministry. Unlike the seven sanctifying gifts, they are not bestowed equally among Christians but are provided according to need, our roles and purposes in the Body of Christ, and the specific situations into which Christ leads us.

1. **Speaking with wisdom:** If a co-worker or family member comes to you with a problem and you have no idea how to help, the Holy Spirit can supernaturally give you insights to share that will target the real issue and make a real difference.

2. **Speaking with knowledge:** With the Holy Spirit, you can know what is humanly impossible to know, as the need arises, even without being aware that the need exists. For example, writing or saying exactly the right words without knowing the listener's situation.

3. **Faith:** We assume that when we don't get the hoped-for answers to prayer, it's because our faith isn't strong enough, but faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit; we have all the wonder-working faith that Jesus had (see Matthew 17:19) if God agrees that our prayer should be answered the way we want it to be answered.

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4. **Healing:** The Holy Spirit provides the power for supernatural healings. Some Christians have this gift in abundance and therefore have a ministry of healing. Others find themselves in momentary situations where Jesus wants to heal through the laying on of hands or intercessory prayers. In an active relationship with the Holy Spirit, we are open and ready to be God's instruments for miracles of the body, mind, and soul.

5. **Miracles:** In addition to miracles of healing, the Holy Spirit can and does perform supernatural works in any situation. A frequent example of this is the changing of bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Jesus during Mass.

6. **Prophecy:** Exhorting, encouraging, or speaking a truth that's been forgotten or rejected are the works of God's prophets. They give messages from the Holy Spirit for the Christian community. A prophecy is rarely about the future, it's usually meant to help us follow Christ and serve the kingdom of God in present difficulties.

7. **Discerning of spirits:** When you need help in identifying right from wrong, or detecting lies, or sensing the presence of demons and angels, the Holy Spirit makes the truth clear with this gift.

8. **Speaking in tongues:** The gift of tongues is received (when God chooses to give it) by submission of our own tongues to the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues is the gift of prophecy plus the total submission of the tongue. This is different than praying in tongues, which is when we quit praying in our own language and let the Spirit do the praying.

9. **Interpreting tongues:** The gift of speaking in tongues is pointless unless there is someone present who can translate it for the listeners. When the Holy Spirit provides a message in tongues to get our attention, he always provides the interpretation.

The fruits of life in the Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Fruits of the Spirit are the products of a life lived closely connected to the Spirit of God. They are supernatural, because the fruits come directly from the Holy Spirit through our connection to him. The fruit of a life lived in God is good works.

1. **Love** for others is an action of the Holy Spirit. God's love flows into us and out of us due to the power of the Spirit that's at work in us.

2. **Joy** is an action of the Holy Spirit that stirs up supernaturally within us, even during bad times, because we live in God and he lives in us.

3. **Peace** is a gift from Jesus, but it's an action of the Holy Spirit, not as the world gives peace, but as only God can give it.

4. **Kindness** is an action of the Holy Spirit. You know it's supernatural when you feel upset or angry or hurt and yet are able to do an act of kindness for your enemy.

5. **Generosity** is the fruit of knowing that God has been generous with us and enables us, in turn, to be generous with others. It's how God distributes everything he provides. When we live in the Holy Spirit, he counsels us in how, when and where to share what God has given us, and he won't leave us destitute from following his directions.

6. **Faithfulness** is the Holy Spirit at work in us to keep us close to God and obedient to his will. It gives us our hunger for reading the Bible and finding other opportunities to grow in the faith. It produces our desire to follow Christ, and it's what changed us when we converted from a worldly lifestyle to the Christian lifestyle.

7. **Gentleness** is the soft, calm voice when we would otherwise be loud

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and angry. It's the patient, slow approach to evangelizing a resistant unbeliever or a non-church-going Catholic. The Holy Spirit is a gentleman, and when we let him consume our lives with his fire, we find it much easier to be gentle with others.

8. **Self-control** is not self-produced. It's a fruit of a life lived in God. When the Holy Spirit is active within us, we can choose to love when it's difficult to love, we can choose the joy of Christ over the temporary happiness that comes from making our lives easier, we can choose the peace of Christ over the world's way of gaining peace, we can be kind when we don't feel like being kind, we can be generous when it goes against our fears and selfishness, we can be faithful when it doesn't make sense to follow Christ, and we can be gentle when we feel like bashing someone over the head with the Bible they're reacting.

We also have natural fruits that come from our own efforts. They are the products of our deeds and works. As good as they might be, they are not supernatural.

The fruits of the Spirit are good deeds and works that are done joyfully and with a strange peace in the soul. They are actions performed with amazing ease and enjoyment, despite our ordinary, human reluctance or inability. Any displeasure we feel about doing these works disappears, because the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, is enjoying the work and glad to be doing it. And we, in him, take delight and feel great satisfaction from doing the good we accomplish — we, in partnership with the Holy Spirit.

Baptized into the life of the Spirit

In John 3:1-8, Jesus emphasized being "born of water *and spirit*." Why? Because once the disciples received the Holy Spirit, their own spirits were enlivened to continue Christ's mission of redemption. This mission of the Church has been passed down to us. We all have the same vocation as those first disciples (this is called "the common priesthood"). We all have the same Spirit.

A renewal of the Holy Spirit's power in us occurs in every Mass. The word "Mass" has the word "mission" at its root. To attend Mass means to get renewed for the mission. This is why the ministerial priests often end each Mass with Christ's commission: "Go forth to love and serve the Lord and each other." Oh how important it is to stay until the very end of Mass! In those final moments, we are given a powerful blessing, a renewed anointing to go forth under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the agent of our success.

If you ever feel inadequate for the mission God gives, we're not supposed to feel capable. We need to rely upon the Holy Spirit's help. In Romans 8:26-30, St. Paul points out that instead of focusing on our weaknesses or inabilities and inadequacies, instead of paying attention to our insufficiency and powerlessness, we should look to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God partners with us, leads us, and prays with us. He supplies whatever is lacking in us so that we can succeed in the work that the Father calls us to do.

In Luke 12:49-53, Jesus said that he came to light a fire on the earth. Evangelization spreads that fire. The blaze for which he was longing was the fire of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus poured out upon all believers after his ascension.

The Holy Spirit makes us burn with desire to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. The fire that impassions us is the Holy Spirit's activity, a sure sign that his presence is alive and well within us. The purpose of this passion is to evangelize the world around us, where we already live, work, worship, and play, spreading the kingdom of God to those who are ready to receive it.

How passionately is the fire of the Holy Spirit burning within you? Are the gifts and fruits of the Spirit filling your life and ministry?

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