

Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert

THEOLOGY: THE HOLY SPIRIT

THEME

As members of the community of faith, we are animated by the Holy Spirit who breathes the Presence of God into us that we may experience the love of God and engage in the dynamic ministry of Jesus Christ.

CATECHIST COMPETENCIES

As a result of this study, the catechist will be able to

1. expand catechesis on the theology of the Holy Spirit.
2. reflect on the Church's understanding of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in everyday reality.
3. increase awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about salvation for all humankind.
4. reflect on their personal experience of the Holy Spirit.

CATECHISM REFERENCES

§683-747

FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The Holy Spirit exists to animate us lovingly as the people of God. Catechists will be able to develop a deeper understanding of the origin, essence, and effects of the Holy Spirit in the world.

OVERVIEW OF OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A man recently lost his wife in a grotesque traffic accident. The man was utterly devastated by his wife's sudden death and exhibited many signs of having a complete mental breakdown upon hearing the news. His family and friends worried about how he would even get through the funeral. He could hardly get himself to walk into the Church the day of the funeral. He shook and sobbed all through the liturgy. As the liturgy progressed, the man felt a certain calm come over him. He had not planned to give a eulogy but found himself slowly walking up to the pulpit after Communion. For five minutes he spoke lovingly of what a wonderful woman of faith his wife was and how deeply she was committed to God. Everyone was stunned to see such peacefulness flow over him when he had been so overwhelmed with grief. The words he spoke were eloquent and graceful. To this day he credits the Holy Spirit for not only empowering him to give such an inspiring talk at his wife's funeral but to get him through his loss in the

Theology: 1 hour



Completion of this study entitles the catechist to one hour of credit toward certification.

days following her death. The Spirit not only gave the man what he needed but enabled the man to give to others the consolation and hope they also so sorely needed.

We would not exist were it not for the Holy Spirit. As creatures of God, the Holy Spirit breathes life into us, animating us and giving us those qualities that make up personhood. As baptized Christians we give ourselves away to this mysterious and all-consuming Presence that is the Holy Spirit with all of its magnanimity and character. It is the Spirit of God who makes us who we are, guides us on our journey through life, unfolds to us what we are to do as baptized Christians, and continually surprises us with wonderful spiritual gifts.

As Catholic Christians we believe that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity who along with the Creator and the Son make up a unified Divine Power. "Now God's Spirit, who reveals God, makes known to us Christ, his Word, his living Utterance..." (§ 687, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*). We begin our understanding of the Holy Spirit as revealed in the Old Testament, through the life of Jesus, and beyond by the lives of the faithful persons whose experiences of God are recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles*. We know that the presence of the Holy Spirit is essential to the existence of the universe as well as to our everyday activities. Ever so mysterious, this Spirit is made known to us through movements in our lives by which we acknowledge a Divine Presence and Power that is greater than ourselves.

As a community of faith, we are galvanized into action by the Holy Spirit whenever we gather in the name of Jesus to praise, worship, give thanks and ask for what we need. Within our liturgy we regard the sacred signs of water and chrism as that which reflect to us the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst. In our liturgical art we depict the Holy Spirit as dove, fire, and wind based on our scriptural notion of its nature. Yet, we are most times left in awe to simply ponder the mys-

Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert

terious gift in our lives of that sacred movement of God which we call Spirit who advocates for us and brings us closer to God. By nature, the Holy Spirit wants to become known to us, and so for centuries people of faith have studied and reflected on this Third Person of the Trinity and have found themselves being drawn in by the Divine.

Theologian Karl Rahner regards the Trinity as such: "Because God creates as God, He creates as Spirit everything in the world that is constantly new and fresh, free and vital, unexpected and mighty, at once tender and strong." This same Spirit — present at the beginning of time, at the dawn of creation, in the lives of the Prophets of the Old Testament, in the ministry of Jesus and in each one of our hearts now — comforts, consoles, empowers, entitles, challenges, builds up and breaks down. We are grateful for the ability to study the personality of the Holy Spirit who is continually drawing us closer and closer into an intimate relationship with the Heart of all Divine Goodness who is God.

SCRIPTURE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The book of *Genesis* tells us that the Holy Spirit was present at the creation of the world as a mighty wind sweeping over the waters. Throughout the Old Testament we read of the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding prophets, kings and rulers, and all those who professed faith in the one true God. However, these references are somewhat sparse and seemingly as elusive as the Spirit itself. The Spirit is that life-giving energy of Yahweh which leads sometimes powerfully and directly as when parting the waters of the Red Sea or at other times whispering in a tiny voice to people like Samuel. When the Jewish people pray for a Messiah to come they refer to the one who will be anointed with God's Spirit.

In the Gospels we see that Jesus is conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). It is the Holy Spirit who anoints Jesus (Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9; Luke 3:21-22) which not only affirms Jesus' identity as true God and true man but also affirms his power in building the Kingdom of God on Earth. The disciples are sent out after the Resurrection to baptize, forgive sins and spread the good news through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is through the power of the same Holy Spirit still dwelling within the risen Jesus present among us that our communities of faith have divine credentials and a

holy mission to the world. The Pentecost experience will continue to unfold throughout the history of civilization.

THE CHURCH AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe that the Holy Spirit has always existed along with the Father and the Son as Persons of the Trinity. The Church's understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit was initially articulated at the Council of Nicaea in 325, but not with a lot of detail other than to initiate a series of theological debates about the divinity of the Holy Spirit in the years to follow. The Council of Constantinople in 381 further articulated the importance of the Holy Spirit in God's saving plan for humankind by including it in what we now call the Nicene Creed. The Council recognized the relationship of the Holy Spirit with the formation of the Christian community which experiences salvation through baptism as people bound for eternal glory. St. Augustine in the early Church and later St. Thomas Aquinas both expanded our understanding of the Holy Spirit. Both saints spoke of the Holy Spirit as one who gives grace and is to be "used and enjoyed."



Any study of the Church (*ecclesiology*) or study of divine grace (*theological anthropology*) includes *pneumatology*, the division of systematic theology which studies the being and purpose of the Holy Spirit.

Our understanding of who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit does continues to be revealed to us as we continue our journey of faith. Humans are temples of the Holy Spirit which make up the divine assembly of believers called the Church. The Holy Spirit enables and prepares us to be born in God's image and likeness and to do God's work by how we live our lives. The Holy Spirit makes us aware of Christ's presence to us by opening our minds and helping us to understand our Jewish ancestors in faith. The Spirit enables us to claim our spiritual roots and further embrace the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and

the mission of proclaiming Christ to the world in which we are all called to serve .

Because we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, each one of us as individuals is utterly dependent on our membership in the community of faith. The Church and its members are formed by Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit and have been given extraordinary powers to preach, heal, exorcise, pray, proclaim and work miracles through and with the

Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert

power of Jesus Christ working within us. While our human nature is graced, we may still be considered vulnerable because of our ability to sin. But by the power of the Holy Spirit we are able to rise above our human frailty and partake in the divinity of God. Though we are not the same in essence with God, we are drawn into God's omnipotent character by the mystical power of the Holy Spirit.

It is through the seven sacraments that we are most intimately connected to God through the power of the Holy Spirit. The sacraments gift us with the grace we need to live closely with God. There are also those "sacramental moments" whereby we are given the ability to choose to see God and point others to the presence of God where before there was either a mundane experience or a misperception of the absence of God.

Through the seven sacraments we encounter the Divine so that the happiness God desires for us may be ours and we may lead others to that same God-given joy and peacefulness. Because of the grace freely given to us through the sacraments we have God's divine life within us.

This grace of the Holy Spirit is not some static commodity but a life-giving dynamism that makes the world the place God wants it to be. If it is possible for us to be charitable it is only because the Holy Spirit is at work in us. If we are capable of achieving peaceful relations with one another, rising above the human capacity for competition and greed, it is only because of the Spirit. If we are to find our way through the difficulties of life, it is only because the Spirit works as a light shining ever so steadily in the darkness of the circumstances of sickness, disaster, sin and loneliness.

The Holy Spirit makes us triumphant as Church, not in a worldly sense, but through the humility that marked the ministry of Jesus Christ who had nowhere to lay his head and preferred to spend his days with the poor, the most abandoned and those whom no one loved. Through the power of the Holy Spirit our works are effective and bear the fruits of love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The Spirit gives us what we need to be who God calls us to be and to build up the Body of Christ. We know as members of the Church that we do not have complete possession of the Holy Spirit. No one could fully contain the vastness of this aspect of God's Being. We also know that gifts of the Spirit are not genuinely received unless they are simultaneously shared with everyone we meet. Made gifts by the Spirit, we are gifts to one another.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND US

The greatest role model we have of one who cooperated fully with the presence of the Holy Spirit is Mary whose example of complete surrender to the power of God enabled us to be saved by Jesus Christ. Throughout our history we have many powerful role models, people who show us how to ride the wave created by that Spirit who first churned the waters of creation. In the early Church St. Paul gave himself to that cataclysmic presence of the Spirit which led him to be transformed from a hater of Christians to a follower of Jesus. In the Middle Ages people like St. Elizabeth of Hungary yielded to the presence of the Holy Spirit in order to step out of her royal trappings and feed God's hungry ones. In modern times, Dorothy Day became a powerful means through which the Holy Spirit breathed new life into old, abusive systems that chained people and limited their God-given freedom. Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador allowed the Spirit to push him beyond the security of being a bishop to giving up his life for the benefit of the poor and oppressed.

How in our prayer lives, our scripture reflection, our works of charity, our worship, and in our everyday duties do we let the Spirit work through us to build God's Kingdom on earth?

The question can never be more than partially answered and is most times done through trial and error. Monk and writer Thomas Merton once wrote, "Fidelity to the Holy Spirit is the great thing. More trust and peace, less agitation and worry. God can and does do the impossible. I must be without fear and without doubt. And keep on going."

Blessed beings that we are, we have been given the gift of the Spirit and our lives have meaning because the energizing Spirit gives us our identity as companions of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is busy showing each of us how we are to uniquely contribute to continuing the ministry of Jesus on Earth and giving us a vision for the future as a community of faith. It is this same passionate Spirit who will gather our souls when our earthly bodies give out and deliver us safely to the Source of all love who is God.



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REVIEW/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read §737-739 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and discuss how this relates to your call to serve in the role as parish catechist.
2. Read John 20:19-23 and discuss the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church today.
3. How is it possible that the Holy Spirit has existed equally forever in being and purpose along with the Creator and Jesus?
4. Read Galatians 4:1-7 and discuss how it is that the Holy Spirit makes us truly free.
5. The Holy Spirit is believed to be the animating principle of the Church. How does the Holy Spirit animate the Church at large? What are the specific ways the Holy Spirit animates your local parish community?
6. Read Acts 2:1-13 and discuss how the gifts of the fruits of the Holy Spirit are “harvested” by those upon whom the Spirit rested.
7. Discuss the meaning of this statement from 1 Cor. 12:3— “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”
8. Discuss the theological significance of the following traditional symbols for the Holy Spirit: water, fire, light, dove.
9. Read §733-735. Discuss how the gift of God’s love is given to us through the Holy Spirit.
10. Read Acts 2:42-47 and discuss how the presence of the Holy Spirit in the community of faith works to unify while at the same time divide the community.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS/ CRITICAL THINKING

1. What evidence do you have of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your own life experience?
2. Our modern world is wrought with violence, poverty, crime and hunger. What signs do you see, in the midst of all that negativity, of the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the world?
3. Reflect on your parish community. In what ways do you experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in your parish? Are there ways in which you invite the Holy Spirit to provide a more powerful presence into certain aspects of your parish?
4. Who are people you know personally who really exemplify the fruits of the Holy Spirit by what they say and do?
5. Which public figures in our time give witness directly or indirectly to the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the world?
6. Take a few moments of prayer to ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you. Let your creative imagination go wild after praying and in an artistic medium of your choice (paints, crayons, etc.) create your own image of what the Holy Spirit might look like to you. The artistic creation can be an abstract or a literal depiction depending on where the Spirit leads you through your imagination.
7. Compose a Litany to the Holy Spirit simply giving praise and thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit by highlighting its various attributes, fruits, gifts and effects.
8. Compose a Prayer to the Holy Spirit highlighting the specific ways you call upon the Spirit to move into your own life, the lives of your loved ones, and the lives of all the people of the world.

About the author

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