

**The Holy Spirit:
Fruits and Gifts
Reflection #3 of 3**

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*As we prepare for the Feast of Pentecost (2023),
Fr Michael offers three reflections on the Holy Spirit in our lives.*

Introduction

I begin with a word of warning – a warning that is already implicit in everything written so far in these reflections on the Holy Spirit:

Do not look for clear-cut definitions or conclusive statements that end all debate and questioning or pre-set packages that save you wrestling with the Presence of “I AM” in the messy stuff of daily living!

Such definitions and statements and packages say more about our yearning for certainty and control than they say about the Holy Spirit and our submission to God’s will.

Certainly, belief in the Holy Spirit is an article of faith. We must always affirm that. But we must meditate on that, question that, search out the meaning of that, lay ourselves bare before that in our daily lives. We must allow for symbols, metaphors and images to assist us in that “laying bare” because we are in the Presence of the “I AM”! No words or images or definitions or arguments or symbols or packages are adequate to our understanding the Presence of the “I AM”. We must “take off our shoes” and open ourselves to be surprised by the Spirit!



The “Fruits of the Spirit”

The Fruits of the Holy Spirit are innumerable!

Jesus offers a general observation that applies in all situations of human existence – including the situation of his disciples:

every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will know them by their fruits (Matthew 7:17-20).

St Paul is quite specific, however, when he talks about “the fruits of the Spirit”:

Live by the Spirit ... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. ... If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another (Galatians 5:16 & 22-26).

St Paul's list – “love, joy, peace” and so on – is not definitive. We could add the word, “etc” after “self-control”. Yes, St Paul's statement is specific because it explicitly mentions the “fruits” that can flow from our “living by the Spirit”. But is also a generalized statement. See, for example, a similar statement – outpouring! – by St Paul in his Letter to the Colossians:

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (3:12-17).

In these kinds of statements, St Paul is saying, in effect

When you open your mind and heart to the Holy Spirit, over time your life will be transformed; you will experience all that every human heart aspires to – love, joy peace etc.

The basic truth that St Paul's is elaborating is spelled out clearly in his Letter to the Romans:

you received the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out, 'Abba, Father!' The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God (Romans 8:15-16).

The empowering, creative and creating Presence of the “I AM” will be manifest in ways appropriate to the situation to the extent that we allow

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it this way:

The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: “charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity” (#1832).

Read this entry in the context in which it appears in the *Catechism*. It is one entry found within a lengthy section – **Part Three – Life in Christ**, which has 160 specific entries plus 199 summary entries (“In Brief”) in 5 chapters containing 24 Articles. It is not doctrine. It is rather a statement of a customary way of thinking. You may or may not find it helpful.

The following statement from the *Catechism*, quoting St Augustine, you might find helpful:

Love is itself the fulfillment of all our works. There is the goal; that is why we run: we run toward it, and once we reach it, in it we shall find rest (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1829 – citing St Augustine).

The “Gifts of the Holy Spirit”

The *Catechism* – see **Part Three – Life in Christ** – makes the following statement, again using a customary way of thinking about the Holy Spirit in our lives:

The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit (#1830).

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David – see Isaiah 11:1-2. They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations (#1831).

Conclusion

God promised Moses on Sinai:

I shall be with you (See Exodus 3:1-14).

This promise is repeated throughout the Bible. Matthew tells us – with reference to Isaiah 7:14 – that

‘the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us’ (Matthew 1:23).

The very last words of Jesus, according to Matthew are:

‘remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age’ (Matthew 8:20).

At the heart of our faith is the truth: “God is with us”! God’s empowering, creative and creating Presence will always be there for us! That Presence should not be limited by our expectations. We cannot limit the “I AM”. **“I AM” will be there for us as we need that empowering, creative and creating Presence, anywhere, any time.**