



A Family of Faith: Volume I

March Lecture Notes

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

Introduction

- I. The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit
- II. What the Church Is
- III. What the Church Does
- IV. Sacred Art Discussion: *The Agony in the Garden*

Introduction

A. Opening Questions

1. Were the disciples courageous men and women?
2. What are some ways we know they were brave?
3. How did Jesus respond to their human weakness?
4. How do we know that the Apostles' natural courage and commitment to Jesus were not enough to sustain them?
5. How did Jesus reveal His love and mercy in Acts 1:8?

Jesus did not abandon us when He ascended into Heaven. He is always with us!

B. We saw in our first session that the Trinity is the central mystery of our faith

1. Everything God does, He does as a Trinity. So that All God's work takes on certain Trinitarian characteristics
2. In fact, History itself is Trinitarian
3. Notice how in the Creed, we begin by talking about the Father and His work, then the Son and His work, then the Holy Spirit and His work.

(Of course, the Trinity works together on everything, but there's a way that each Person is emphasized through different phases of God's saving plan).

C. So which person is emphasized at which stage of God's work for us?

1. Well, the work of the **Father**, "The Creator of Heaven and Earth," is emphasized in the Old Testament

2. Then the work of the **Son**, which we go over in the second part of the Creed, is emphasized in the Gospel period.
 3. Finally, beginning with Pentecost, we see an emphasis on the work of the **Holy Spirit**
- D. But when we talk about the Holy Spirit's work in this third phase of salvation, we have to talk about two things:
1. The Holy Spirit's *invisible* work in the human soul
 2. The Holy Spirit's *visible* work in the institution of the Catholic Church

So let's get to know the Holy Spirit and His Church

I. The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit

A. The Holy Spirit in History

1. The Holy Spirit is revealed throughout the Old and New Testaments
 - a. Of course, from eternity, the Holy Spirit is with the Father and the Son in the Blessed Trinity
2. But we recognize Him at work in the Old Testament...
 - a. For example: moving over the waters at creation; entering the souls of the first man and woman; and speaking through the prophets
3. and in the New Testament
 - a. For example: overshadowing Our Lady when she conceived Christ; being breathed on the apostles after the Resurrection; coming upon the Church at Pentecost

B. The Holy Spirit in our souls

1. The Holy Spirit is the one who internally prompts us:
 - a. First, to *recognize* Jesus as Lord
 - b. Secondly, to *follow* Jesus in all things
2. It is the Holy Spirit who dwells within us when we are in the state of sanctifying grace
 - a. Only by His presence and power are we able to live as we ought.

3. Many people may feel as though they don't know the Spirit – but that's because He's too close to see. He's the one we owe all our merits and virtues too, and it is He who makes our **being** holy (by Baptism) and our **action** holy (by Confirmation).

C. The Holy Spirit in the Church

1. But it wouldn't be enough if the Holy Spirit were simply an invisible force. God knows we need to use our bodies to enter into a relationship with anyone, including Him.
 - a. So by the power of the Holy Spirit, He has given us a visible Church
2. This Church includes tangible things like Official Church teaching, the Holy Bible, the Blessed Sacraments –
 - a. So we can hear God's directions through our human ears, read God's word with our human eyes, and touch God Himself in the sacraments
 - b. And it is the Holy Spirit, who is the **soul of the Church**, who preserves and sanctifies these heavenly gifts

II. What the Church is

- A. The Church is the **community of the faithful**, which includes both the laity and the hierarchy
 1. Never in salvation history did God deal merely with an isolated individual (think how misguided was Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?")
 2. We pursue our eternal destiny together, as a family, and that family is the Church.
- B. Now, very importantly, the Church is a **Mystical Body**
 1. Paul, over and over, calls the Church "the Body of Christ"
 - a. As we just saw, the **invisible soul** of the Church is **the Holy Spirit**
 - b. And the **head** of the Church is **Christ**
 2. But if the Church is Christ's body, then that has some major implications
 - a. First of all, a body is *visible* (by definition, a body is something material, something tangible). So the Church

can't just be an "invisible community of all believers." It has to be a concrete institution.

- b. Secondly, a body is *organized* (a body, after all, has *organs*, and all the parts of the body are precisely coordinated to work together). So it doesn't make sense for a Christian to say, "I don't believe in organized religion."
- c. Thirdly, a body is how you relate to a person. A man can't say to his wife, "I want to have a relationship with you, but I don't want your body to get in the way. I don't want to see, or touch, or hear your body." So too, if the Church is Christ's body, it doesn't make sense to say, "I want a relationship with Christ, but I don't want the Church to get in the way." The Church is precisely *how* you have a relationship with Christ.

C. Finally, it is the Church (the Mystical Body of Christ) who gives us the most intimate access to God through the Eucharist (which is the Sacramental Body of Christ).

- 1. These two ways of Christ being present complement each other and depend on each other
 - a. So it's a great mistake to emphasize the Eucharist without the Church, or the Church without the Eucharist
 - b. Christ's Body is Christ's Body – and it's how we come to Him

III. What does the Church do?

A. The Church is the community of believers, but every community needs leadership

- 1. That's why Jesus gave us Peter and the Apostles, and they in turn appointed successors (the popes and the bishops), to direct the Church until Christ should come again.

B. Under this leadership of the Pope and Bishops, the Church fulfills three tasks

- 1. The Church **teaches**
 - a. The Church keeps safe the truths of revelation
 - b. The teaching authority of the Church makes sure that our faith is never corrupted, never contradicts itself, and

- never invents a new teaching that isn't based on the original witness of Scripture and the Apostles
- c. Have you ever wondered how it is that official Church teaching hasn't contradicted itself in the course of two thousand years? Or why the "telephone effect" hasn't made us believe totally different things from the first Christians?
 - d. It's because the Holy Spirit has safeguarded the Church's power to teach

2. The Church **sanctifies**

- a. It is by the power of the apostles and their successors that we have the Seven Sacraments, which God uses to make His people Holy
- b. It's the unbroken chain of ordination from the first apostles down to today's popes, bishops, priests, and deacons, that makes us confident that the miraculous power of the sacraments endures

3. The Church **governs**

- a. Christ appointed the apostles as *shepherds*, to lead the sheep – and gave them His power of binding and loosing (especially Peter in Matthew 16:19).
- b. Christ is, as we saw, Head of the Church, and He continues to lead His people through the authority of His apostles today.

What a blessing to have Christ Himself teaching us, making us holy, and giving us direction, through His Sacred Body, the Church!

IV. Sacred Art Discussion: *The Agony in the Garden* by El Greco

- A. When you look at the painting, what do you first notice? What is your favorite part?
 - 1. Accept all answers.
- B. Do the figures in this painting look realistic? If not, how would you describe the way they look? How do the unreal shapes add to the painting's expressiveness?
 - 1. The figures in this painting do not have realistic proportions but instead are elongated with distorted facial features that indicate the spiritual dimensions of the scene. Accept all answers.

- C. Who are the people in this painting? What sorrowful mystery of the Rosary is depicted here?
1. Jesus is the central figure in the scene, wearing red to signify His upcoming passion. The ministering angel holds a cup or a chalice, also referencing His passion, the final “cup” He has to drink. Peter, James, and John are sleeping in a dark, womb-like cave beneath the angel. Judas leads soldiers in the background to come arrest Jesus. The sorrowful mystery of the Rosary depicted here is the Agony in the Garden.
- D. Read Matthew 26:36-46 and Luke 22:39-46. How does this painting help you understand these verses?
1. Accept all answers.
- E. What feelings does Jesus describe having in this Gospel passage? What other feelings do you think He might have experienced during this time? Why?
1. Matthew’s Gospel relates how Jesus’ feels sorrow and distress, and He tells the Apostles that His soul is sorrowful even unto death. Luke describes how Jesus’ sweat was like drops of blood. Jesus prays to the Father that the cup of His suffering be taken away, but He asked that the Father’s will, not His will, be done. Accept all other answers.
- F. What do the Gospels tell us that Peter, James, and John were feeling?
1. Their spirits were willing, but their flesh was weak. They wished to keep watch with Jesus, but exhaustion overwhelmed them. They were fearful when the soldiers came and arrested Jesus. Accept other answers.
- G. What do this painting and the Gospel story of the Agony in the Garden teach us about how we should understand our feelings in the face of our trials?
1. Explain that it is completely normal and acceptable to be fearful when we are about to face suffering or a great trial, or even the small difficult things in life.
During these times we must give our suffering and fears to the Father and ask that His will be done. Accept other answers.

Discussion Questions

1. Who is the Holy Spirit?
 - a. The Third Person of the Blessed Trinity.
2. Of all the symbols of the Holy Spirit, which is your favorite? Which seems closest to how you feel the Holy Spirit is working in your life?
 - a. Answers will vary.
3. In what ways do we see Him at work in the Old Testament? In the New Testament?
 - a. In the beginning, the Spirit of God moved over the waters, the Father

breathed life into Adam; the Holy Spirit spoke to Moses out of a burning bush and appeared to him as a cloud; the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit preserved the Blessed Virgin Mary from all sin and conceived Jesus in Mary's womb. Throughout His life Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as a Life Giver or as a Counselor. The Risen Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit onto the Apostles as He gave them the power to forgive or retain sins (John 20:21-23). He told the Apostles He would send the Holy Spirit to give them the fortitude they would need to spread the Gospel.

4. Is it more difficult to understand the Holy Spirit than it is to understand God the Father or Jesus Christ? Why or why not?
 - a. Answers will vary.
5. What feast is known as the birthday of the Church?
 - a. Pentecost.
6. What happened on this day? Why is it called the birthday of the Church?
 - a. Ten days after Jesus ascended into Heaven, Mary and the Apostles were gathered in the Upper Room. Suddenly they heard a rush of wind, and tongues of fire came to rest on their heads. The Holy Spirit poured down on them. They were able to speak all different languages and were given the wisdom, understanding, and fortitude — and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit — to spread the gospel far and wide.
7. The Church is both visible and invisible. It is an outward sign of an invisible reality. How would you put that in your own words?
 - a. Answers will vary, but participants should recognize that the Church, established by God, is both human (visible) and divine (invisible).
8. The Church has a visible hierarchy, established by her founder, Jesus Christ. What are some ways we know Jesus made St. Peter the first pope — or visible head of the Church? (Hint: for more ideas, see the Saint of the Month reading in addition to the background reading!)
 - a. Jesus gave Peter the keys to the Kingdom and told him that what he bound and loosed on earth would be bound and loosed in Heaven. After Jesus' Resurrection, Jesus told Peter three times to feed His flock.
9. How is membership in the People of God different from belonging to a certain race, ethnicity, or culture?
 - a. We are not part of it because of our race, or birth, or nationality; rather, we are baptized into it.
10. How does this quote from Scripture connect to the People of God? "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendant, heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:27-29).
 - a. The Holy Spirit unites all the People of God. We are individuals yet

part of one body.

11. How are the People of God like a family?
 - a. God is our Father, and, as children of the King of kings, we have freedom and dignity.
12. God has given each of us special gifts that we can use to serve Him and our neighbor. What are some of the gifts He has given you? How can you use them to do God's will?
 - a. Answers will vary.
13. In what ways can we understand the phrase "Body of Christ"?
 - a. The Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the body of believers who make up the People of God and the Church.
14. "I am the vine, you are the branches," Jesus said in John 15:5. What do you think He meant?
 - a. He is the source of our life, and we are united with Him.
15. What is the threefold mission of the Church?
 - a. To teach, sanctify, and govern.
16. Christ is the head of the Body, and the Holy Spirit is its soul. How would you put this idea in your own words?
 - a. Christ is the founder of the Church, and the Holy Spirit is what gives it life, as the soul gives life to a body.

Reminders and Announcements

- A. The next Community Meeting picnic will take place at **[location]** on **[date]**.
Provide information for your parish

Living the Faith At Home

- A. Put up the **March Fridge Page** and the **Car Conversations hang tag**.
- B. Choose the activities that will work best for your family. For example, some children may prefer reading and discussion, while others might prefer crafts.
- *You are not required to do all the activities in the book.*
- C. Your children will learn the Faith from your witness as parents better than through any structured activity.
 1. Fridge page and car conversations can be found in their Parent's Guide at the beginning of this month's lesson.
 2. This program is first and foremost about their own formation, and secondarily about helping them teach their children. "Put your own mask on first," as they say!

Key Points in Our Reading This Month

- A. The Holy Spirit is the third Divine Person of the Trinity, and we can see His work in the Old and New Testaments.
- B. Jesus did not leave His disciples orphans. He sent the Holy Spirit to be with

us.

- C. Jesus founded the Church and made St. Peter the first pope.
- D. Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Apostles, is the birthday of the Church.
- E. The Holy Spirit guides the Church, and He will also guide us.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for offering Yourself as a sacrifice for us and for sending the Holy Spirit to guide Your Church. After Your agony in the garden, You told Your disciples that “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” As we approach the Sacred Triduum, the families gathered here want to pray with You as You enter willingly into Your Passion. You never abandon us, and we do not wish to abandon You. Please send Your Holy Spirit to be with us so we can grow in holiness and be strong and faithful to our promises, just as You always are. Amen.