

More about the Holy Spirit...

This is a different kind of article from those I usually write – it relies on you to do most of the work! You'll need a Bible to hand – in case you're not used to looking up Bible references, 'Exodus 33:7-11', for example, means that we're looking at the *Book of Exodus, Chapter 33, Verses (small numbers in the text) 7-11*.

I think that we often feel a bit confused about God the Holy Spirit, and that it might help to look at a few things we know about Him.

In the Old Testament

The Holy Spirit gets a mention right at the beginning of the Bible (Genesis 1:2, though not all translations show it). From the start He's God 'down here', at work hands-on in the world.

We read of the Holy Spirit coming to prophets, kings and other key people through the Old Testament (eg Judges 3:10, 6:34; 1 Samuel 10:9-10; Ezekiel 2:2) but came to them temporarily, for particular moments and tasks. For day-to-day contact with God, people had to go first to the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 33:7-11) and then to the Temple (from 2 Chronicles 7:1 onward).

Through this time, there was a promise that one day God would transform his relationship with his people (Ezek.36:26-27, Joel 2:28-29)

In the New Testament

Jesus spoke several times about the Holy Spirit (eg. Luke 4:18-19, Matt.10:20, John 3:5). He said that the Father would always send the Spirit when we ask (Luke 11:9-13), and he promised that when he returned to heaven he would send the Spirit to his disciples in a new and fuller way (John 14:15-17). This happened at the first Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), seven weeks after Easter. That was the day when Joel's prophecy began to be fulfilled, the Christian Church started, and things would never be the same again!

The Spirit leads us

At the Last Supper, Jesus concentrated on how the Holy Spirit would lead his disciples onward when he was no longer with them to teach them how to face new situations. (John 14:15-27, John 16:5-15) We need to pray for God's help to interpret Jesus' teaching and example for our own day – we face questions that he never had to, as well as many that would have been very familiar!

The Spirit makes us 'different but together'

St Paul writes about the Church as the 'Body of Christ', made alive through the Spirit of Christ. It's a wonderful image, especially as Paul develops it to show us how our different gifts, personalities and abilities are all needed to make the body whole, just as the different limbs and organs of the body work together. He's clear that the Spirit unites us as one body, but also that the same Spirit gives us all different gifts and abilities – some seeming 'ordinary', some quite strange! (Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12). What gifts has the Spirit given to you to use as part of the Church?

The Spirit makes us more like Jesus

While the Spirit gives different gifts to different people, St Paul tells us that there are some things He helps us all to grow in – the 'Fruits of the Spirit' (Galatians 5:22-23) – essentially the marks of a character becoming more like Jesus. Do take note that the key thing is the *becoming* more like Jesus –

some of us start with further to go than others! The important thing is that we (and others around us) can see that we're making some progress with the Spirit's help. In which of these do *you* most need the Spirit to be at work?

The Spirit helps us to pray

In fact, it's more than just that the Spirit helps us to pray. He somehow, living within us, draws us into the whole life of God. But let's start with prayer. Most of us who try to pray find times when it's hard to find the words. Paul tells us that at these times the Spirit prays from within us (Romans 8:26-27 – in fact it's worth reading the whole of chapter 8 to think about life in the Spirit) – God speaks to God, and gives us the chance to get involved in the conversation!

Receiving the Holy Spirit

The sign and sacrament of receiving the Holy Spirit is confirmation. But there's a long tradition of asking another Christian to pray for you to receive, or to know that you've received, the Holy Spirit to work in your life. If you'd like to talk more about this, please talk to your Church minister.

Enjoy life with God, in the strength of his Holy Spirit!

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