

Images for the Holy Spirit

As well as mentioning the Spirit by name, the Bible also offers us a number of images that denote the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit as a wind: Exodus 10: 13, 19

The Spirit as breath: Genesis 2:7

The Spirit as silence: 1 Kings 19:12

The Spirit as a dove: Mark 1:10

The Spirit as a wind and tongues of fire: Acts 2: 1 - 4

Having completed the work that the Father had sent him to do, Jesus warned his disciples just before he left them that he would not be with them forever. However, he promised that he would send “the Comforter” and “the Advocate”, who would continue to work with them to help them proclaim the good news of God’s Kingdom. After the resurrection Jesus told his disciples to stay in Jerusalem to wait for the promise of the Father for

“John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5)

In the period after the resurrection, but before the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the disciples did as Jesus had asked and stayed in Jerusalem. They had hope, for they had seen Jesus alive after his death and he had promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to help them. He had talked with them, eaten with them, and then he had taken them outside the city and given them some last words. The disciples must have found it very hard to be without Jesus, and to live so close to the authorities that had crucified him. However, they waited patiently until the fiftieth day after the Passover at Pentecost. Then, when the disciples were all together in one room, the Holy Spirit came upon them.

The description of what happened is one of the most dramatic in the New Testament. Only Luke mentions this scene, in his second book, the Acts of the Apostles, and he must have found it almost impossible to describe what happened. Here are his words:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 1: 1 – 4)

In the packed city there were men of all nationalities, and those present were amazed that they could understand the disciples in their own language. How could these uneducated men, with their distinctive Galilean accents, speak so many languages? The event was so dramatic that

some onlookers assumed they were drunk for they seemed to them to be babbling. Peter had to exclaim that they were not drunk for it was 'only nine o'clock in the morning'. (Acts 2:15)

This was only the first appearance of the Spirit in their lives, only the first empowerment by God. In the first few chapters of the Acts of the Apostles the Spirit is seen at work a number of times, and the effect of the Spirit on the disciples is immediately apparent. Peter, who had three times denied he knew Jesus before the crucifixion, now has courage to stand up and address all the people who are assembled. He is fluent, quoting prophecy from Scripture, and testifying that Jesus has risen from the dead. Suddenly an uneducated fisherman has become able to evangelize a huge crowd. God's presence and power, through his Holy Spirit, enables him to say:

Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:36)

A few days later Peter and John, making their daily visit to the Temple, are faced with a lame beggar. Only a few weeks previously they had been unable to heal a young man at the foot of the mountain of transfiguration, but now Peter addresses the beggar with confidence:

I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk...and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. (Acts 3: 6 – 7)

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, these men were bold enough to stand their ground and tell their listeners of the good news of Jesus Christ. They were bold enough, as with Stephen, to go to their deaths. The Holy Spirit had changed their lives forever, and was to fill them with hope for the word to come. This was what led them to take the good news to the rest of the world.

God's work was not restricted to a place and time in history. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus could be with all his followers, then and in the future. The Spirit could also enter the hearts of men and women and change them from within. As a man, Jesus was unable to do this, but the Spirit could enter the lives of individuals who had chosen to turn to God. St. Paul was to pray for new converts in Ephesus:

That you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. (Ephesians 3: 16 – 17)

The Holy Spirit brought specific gifts to the disciples and to all those who received the Spirit in the early days of the Church and to those who have received him today. The Church has traditionally spoken of these as the "sevenfold gifts" of the Holy Spirit:

The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11: 2- 3).

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The Spirit still brings gifts to individuals, for God's work:

***Wisdom* to see things the way that God does;**

***Understanding* of what God wants;**

***Counsel* to help us to know what to do when things are difficult;**

***Inward strength* to live in the way we know God wants us to live;**

***Knowledge* of the truth as revealed in Jesus;**

***True godliness* to live in a holy relationship with God as our Father and with others as our brothers and sisters;**

***Fear of the Lord* to enable us to respond to God and giving us a fear that we may be separated from him.**

Everyone who has been baptized has already received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We need to develop all gifts of the Spirit in order to carry out God's work in his world.

Reflection Activity

Look back over your own life and identify where the Holy Spirit has been at work in the "peaks and valleys" your life.

How might a child experience the work of the Holy Spirit in his/her life? What are some situations in which he/she would need to call upon courage, strength, wisdom, or the other gifts of the Spirit?