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PENTECOST

WITH THE
CHURCH FATHERS

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A Seven-Week Retreat on the
Person and the Presence of the Holy Spirit

TAN Books
Gastonia, North Carolina

Pentecost with the Church Fathers: A Seven-Week Retreat on the Person and Presence of the Holy Spirit © 2023 TAN Books

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“It is impossible to worship the Son except in the Holy Spirit; it is impossible to call upon the Father except in the Spirit of adoption.”

—St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, sec. 11.27

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and
kindle in them the fire of Your love.
Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created. And
You shall renew the face of the earth.
O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did
instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the
same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise and
ever enjoy His consolations.
Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.*

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Introduction

HOW TO APPROACH THESE PAGES

THE CHRISTIAN celebration of Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Mary and the first disciples. Pentecost is to the Holy Spirit what Epiphany is to the Son: having been born from the pierced side of Christ on the cross, the Holy Spirit now manifests Christ's Church as the universal instrument of salvation, evidenced by visitors from all over the world coming to witness this new inbreaking of God's Spirit. Christ's nascent body is now empowered, inspired even, to go out into the world and proclaim that the Kingdom of God has now come for all.

That is why, fifty days after Easter, the Church receives the fullness of the Third Person of the Trinity. These fifty days would have naturally reminded the first Christians of their old Jewish feast of Weeks, during which they thanked Yahweh for His bounty, seven weeks after the first harvest of grain (see Ex 34:22). But now, instead of material sustenance, God sends His very self and shows how He longs to dwell personally in the souls of His chosen people.

Despite the haste with which this glorious event occurred, a theology and a spirituality of the Holy Spirit would take centuries to unfold. Unlike the Father and the Son, the Spirit, by His very name, is ethereal and abstract, not at all easy to imagine or define. But we can only love what we know, so greater love demands greater and greater knowledge and familiarity of one's beloved. Consequently,

the Church spent the first few centuries defining and defending the divinity and the work of the Holy Spirit because the earliest theologians also knew that the more we could know accurately about God, the more ardently we would be able to love Him. Furthermore, in knowing and loving Him more deeply, we could more easily and readily discern what He desires to do in our lives.

This latest work from TAN Books, *Pentecost with the Church Fathers*, is a unique way to be with these early Christian thinkers as they came to reflect on the Person of the Spirit of God. Who is the Holy Spirit, and what are the effects of His indwelling in my life? How do the Sacred Scriptures portray Him, and how did the Church come to profess Him in her creeds and councils? Yet this book is not designed simply as a study in history but as a do-it-at-home retreat, a personal invitation to grow in mystical union with the Holy Spirit.

The following pages are divided into seven thematic chapters following the seven weeks between Eastertide and the Monday after Pentecost, the memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. Each week offers a focused collection of quotes from the Church Fathers along with salient selections from the Bible, the Holy Mass, or the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* regarding the Third Person of the Trinity. Each week also ends with the Gospel proclaimed that week at Mass.

Your task in working your way through each week is to meditate slowly on whatever passage or word or image resonates within you. Read and meditate while always asking what the Spirit might be trying to teach you at any given moment. *Multum non multa*, “much of one thing and not many things,” is a classic Latin adage to keep in mind. If you find yourself drawn to a particular passage or word, stay there and ask the Holy Spirit why this struck you so strongly. As you ponder these words, you might be drawn to jot down what has resonated in your soul. To this end, along with each selection of text, you will also find space to answer some questions and jot down some thoughts. Spend time looking at these questions and (knowing of course that you can do with these whatever you wish)

asking the Holy Spirit to direct you toward the exercises that might produce the greatest fruit.

This ancient practice of reflecting on one's own life presupposes that God is working in your life in a way that He is not working in anyone else's life. You are His beloved, and His message to you conforms perfectly to your own personal state in life, your occupation, family situation, and all the other experiences that make up the unique story which is your life. Being as concrete as possible is the Christian's way of fighting against the convenient temptation of keeping God solely in the spiritual, reducing Him to an abstract being whose presence is necessary only in times of trial or, as in the minds of most today, only at the time of death where it's your last chance to get it right. No, God is speaking to you now; He is speaking to you precisely as you are right now. What follows is TAN Books' invitation to sit prayerfully with some of the most foundational Christian thinkers, to read their words, and then for you to invite the Holy Spirit to descend freshly into each moment in your life as you concretely show Him that you are now ready to grow in holiness.

The ultimate question to contemplate as you begin this retreat is: Do I have a deep familiarity with the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit? In other words: Do I know who He is and what He does? Is the Holy Spirit real to me? Am I able to have a special friendship with Him, clearly different from my connection with God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ? Is the Holy Spirit someone whom I invite into my life, someone whose voice is familiar to me and whose promptings throughout the day I am able to recognize and trust?

When a Christian explicitly sets time aside for daily prayer or an annual retreat, it is an ancient practice to begin each morning of your day by immediately turning your thoughts to the theme or the word or the special virtue the Lord might be speaking to you about that very day. As we begin this retreat, think about getting a journal—a pad of paper or simple notebook would do—and using this to jot down the messages and feelings that will no doubt come

through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As in any relationship between persons, the more intentional and generous you are with the other (even God), the more He can be with you. Like anything, deepening our prayer life requires the execution of a definite plan, so do not be afraid to tell God what it is you want each day and exactly what gifts you hope to receive from Him.

While we can rest assured God will in fact do what He promises, we, too, must put into practice what we are now setting out to do. So let's begin with some concrete particulars.

To begin, think about how true this is: You can only pray as you can, not as you can't. This axiom requires you to be honest with your own limitations and time commitments. You are (probably) not a monk or cloistered religious; you are (probably) a married person, maybe an extremely busy parent, someone living in the world of demands and deadlines, someone living out your God-given vocation in the messiness of the twenty-first century. That means you cannot pray as a desert hermit or a nun behind a grille; in fact, it would actually be sinful for you to try to find God outside the vocation He has given you. You are therefore to be "shrewd as serpents" (Mt 10:16) in figuring out how to let the Lord increase your holiness.

It is essential to remember that we cannot always control what comes in and out of our minds, but we can control our bodies. If you and the Lord determine that ten minutes, fifteen minutes, or a half hour (whatever it be) is what you will commit yourself to, stay there for that ten minutes, that fifteen minutes, or that half hour. Even if you are drifting off to sleep, even if your mind is racing elsewhere, be still. Be still and gently ask the Lord to help bring your consciousness back to His presence within and before you. What you do not want to do is to think, "Oh well, nothing is happening; I'll come back later." Let's face it. You probably won't come back later, because the kids will be home, you'll have to make supper, you'll be too tired, and so on. Commit yourself to a time and maybe even to a place and simply stay there. *That is your first and most fundamental commitment.*

Therefore, start by asking yourself and the Holy Spirit: How much time can I realistically devote to prayer each day? Be very truthful here: we rarely find the time; we must be intentional in carving out and making that time happen. What time of day is best for me to select that amount of time? Second: Where would I most in truth be able to do this—my bedroom, someplace in the house, in the car, at the office? In the end, begin with what is doable for you. Third: What do I truly want from this retreat? Where are my desires, my doubts, my fears, and my hopes? What do I want the Lord to know about me? What petition(s) do I want Him to hear and hopefully answer?

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to answer and to commit to the following:

When you look ahead at the next seven weeks, how much time per day can you commit to meditating on these pages and giving yourself to private prayer?

I commit myself to _____ minutes of prayer each day, usually from _____ to _____, and, when possible, at this place: _____.

Can you name what has motivated you to make this particular retreat at this time in your life?

Can you name the ways God might be speaking to you right now?

Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work? Do you talk to God in general or do you have a different relationship with God the

Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? How do you imagine each and interact with each differently?

We shall all, of course, have our own ideas swirling around these fundamental questions. We all have varied experiences of God's presence, and we are all unique and irreducible to anyone else. Your prayer life may look a lot like other Christians', but none of us will be identical in our desires and certainly not in our life's experiences. Nonetheless, God has each of us in mind as His beloved children and longs—yearns, even to the point of becoming one of us—to be more active in our lives. For this reason, the Holy Spirit has been sent not only “cosmically” but *personally* and *uniquely* into each of our lives. Our response must now be one of trust, trust that God loves us and thirsts for a deeper intimacy with us, and a desire on our part to know the Spirit and hear His voice.

Each of our seven weeks of retreat will begin with the theme for the Sunday Mass of that week. Between Easter and Pentecost, the Church works her way through the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel of John. Every day's readings can be found on many websites (www.usccb.org, for example), and we encourage you to unite our retreat with the daily Mass readings. While the following is in no way a commentary on the Scriptures, all Christians must keep the Bible at the front and center of their prayer lives. This is the Word of God, the Word that points us to the Word, Jesus Christ. That is why Scripture and Sacred Tradition, as the two fountains of revelation, were given to us by Christ Himself. Keeping these two fountains together is your life as a Christian. It is for you that all of this was done, for your salvation and eternal joy. Consequently, be bold in bringing your daily experiences and fears and hopes and stresses to your prayer life and to the words that follow.



Week 1

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BIBLE

EACH DAILY liturgy through Easter week naturally focuses our attention on the risen Christ and how His first disciples came to receive the Good News of love's triumph over sin and death. Since the lectionary from which the Mass readings are proclaimed is divided into a three-year cycle, you may hear a Gospel on this Easter Sunday from:

John 20:1–9,
Matthew 28:1–10,
Mark 16:1–7, or
Luke 24:13–35.

As subtly different as each Gospel author portrays this pivotal scene, the message is the same: Jesus Christ is God Himself, and He alone can defeat all that we have freely put between ourselves and the Father.

Easter is not over today or even this week. Easter is completed only by Pentecost: there may be forty days of Lenten observance, but there are fifty days of Easter celebration. Easter is completed only by Pentecost because the work of Christ finds fulfillment in the work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Lord Himself tells us, "But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to

you” (Jn 16:7). As we shall see in the week to come, the Holy Spirit is already clearly active before Christ’s coming to earth—He is present at creation symbolized by the “mighty wind,” and He rushes upon Old Testament figures like Samson and King David. Yet it is the Sacred Triduum that unlocks the Holy Spirit’s presence into the Christian people in a new and everlasting manner. It is the crucified heart of Christ that melts our hearts to the degree where we finally let another in, where we finally admit our need for a humble Savior. In this receiving of the wounded Christ, then, our hearts are prepared to become sharers in the Spirit who makes us children of the same Father as Jesus:

After Christ had completed his mission on earth, it still remained necessary that we should become partakers and sharers of the divine nature of the Word. We had to give up our own life and be so transformed that we would begin to live an entirely new kind of life that would be pleasing to God. However, this was something we could do only by sharing the Holy Spirit. And the most fitting and appropriate time for the mission and descent of the Holy Spirit to us was . . . the occasion of our Savior’s departure to heaven. As long as Christ was with them in the flesh, the believers would have thought that they possessed all the blessings he had to offer. But when the time came for him to ascend to his Father in heaven, it was necessary for him to be united through his Spirit to those who worshiped him and to dwell in our hearts through faith. Only by the Spirit’s presence within us in this way could he give us the confidence to cry out, “Abba, Father,” and enable us to grow in holiness.¹

The possible Gospels for Easter Mass, whether it be the vigil or later Sunday morning Masses, the Gospel for years A, B, or C all focus our attention on the empty tomb. It is this tomb that ultimately saves our soul, yet the cross is what brings us face to face with what

¹ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, 10.16.7, in *A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church Anterior to the Division of the East and West*, vol. 48 (Oxford: John Henry Parker Publishers, 1800-81), 443–44.

we have done and what we too would be if it were not for the grace of Jesus Christ. We are all sinners, and all have, therefore, merited death. But God loves us too much to let that happen, so as Adam and Eve were shamefully leaving Eden, God began to prepare the entire world for His Son's and Spirit's coming. Through the Old Testament figures, He foreshadowed the True Lamb of Sacrifice and manifested some of His Spirit's power to His chosen people.

The ascension of Jesus begins the great novena, the nine days between Christ's bodily return to the Father and the subsequent descent of the Holy Spirit. This great movement means great mystery, and we shall slowly unpack the implications of the Son's sending of the Holy Spirit as our retreat unfolds.

To begin, then, let us return to the source of God's Word to all of humanity, searching His Scriptures for the Holy Spirit's appearance and activity, focusing on His descent as portrayed by the Apostle Luke at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles:

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. (Acts 2:1–6)

The word *spirit* can be used in diverse ways. We talk about the spirit of the age or the spirit of a room, team spirit, or even those flask-filling spirits that can inebriate. We talk about some people being in-spired, and today the word *spiritual* has oftentimes come to mean someone who might take the deeper things of life more seriously than most. Spirit can obviously mean many different things to many different people, a word that is difficult to restrict to any one particular definition.

Given this level of etherealness, why do you think the Third Person of the Trinity wants to be known initially as Spirit, describing Himself in Scripture as someone who is as agile as the wind but as important and divine as God?

Since we were little, we have probably imagined God the Father as an older gentleman sporting a big white beard; we all have had pictures of the Son as Jesus Christ who is depicted as a baby in Mary's arms and as a grown man who walked on dusty plains performing miracles and teaching crowds. We all have depictions of Jesus's crucifixion and can readily imagine His glory after His resurrection from the dead three days later. While these images tell us something certainly true, they are obviously our own depictions over the centuries. As insufficient as these pictures and portraits really are, however, we have an even less accurate image of the Holy Spirit. Even the Bible stretches to find symbols to describe Him: light as a breeze, zealous as fire, peaceful as a dove—very lithe and even lofty images, symbols that leave a lot more room for our own imaginations and definitions.

What do you know about the Holy Spirit? Can you list three images or words to describe Him in your life?

Describe a time you have felt close to the Spirit's presence.

Does the Spirit's invisible presence frighten you or comfort you? Why?

But who does the Bible say this Spirit is? Or more precisely, as the author of the Bible, who does the Holy Spirit Himself say He is? First, we should notice how He chooses to reveal Himself slowly, knowing our limited capacity to understand Him. Second, collaborating with the hands and the minds of each particular human author, the Holy Spirit prompted these men with the scriptural images, words, and wisdom that would become the fundamental basis of all Christian truth. Consequently, it is the Holy Spirit who covertly introduces Himself in the opening line of all Sacred Scripture: "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters . . ." (Gn 1:1–2).

The great Christian Tradition has always encountered all three of the divine persons of the Trinity in these words of the Spirit: "God" is the Father who creates; the "beginning" is the Son in whom the Father creates, providing the pattern and the promise of all creation (the word for "beginning" here is not the word for a temporal or chronological start but is the word for a "principle" or even an "archetype," the Son in whom all things have come to be; cf. Jn 1:3). Finally, that "mighty wind sweeping over the waters" refers to the Holy Spirit who informs all of creation by His universal presence.

And the Spirit of God was borne upon the face of the waters. Does this spirit mean the diffusion of air? The sacred writer wishes to enumerate to you the elements of the world, to tell you that God created the heavens, the earth, water, and air and that the last was now diffused and in motion; or rather, that which is truer and confirmed by the authority of the ancients, by the Spirit of God, he means the Holy Spirit. It is, as has been remarked, the special name, the name above all others that Scripture delights to give to the Holy Spirit, and always by the spirit of God the Holy Spirit is meant, the Spirit which completes the divine and blessed Trinity. You will find it better therefore to take it in this sense. How then did the Spirit of God move upon the waters? It cherished the nature of the waters as one sees a bird cover the eggs with her body and impart to them vital force from her own warmth. Such is, as nearly as

possible, the meaning of these words—the Spirit was borne: let us understand, that is, prepared the nature of water to produce living beings: a sufficient proof for those who ask if the Holy Spirit took an active part in the creation of the world.²

Saint Basil (d. 379), the very influential bishop of Caesarea in modern-day Turkey, makes sure his readers understand the Spirit's activity here "in this sense," realizing that the Spirit can be understood in various ways. The "special name" Basil knows Scripture uses for the Holy Spirit is the Hebrew *rûah*, and it is used almost four hundred times in the Old Testament.

God's chosen people saw in this term *rûah* three different uses. The first and most foundational usage is spirit as the "breath" of God that vivifies creatures. We see this right in the beginning when God breathes His own life into humanity, giving us our unique status as God's own images and likenesses: "Then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gn 2:7). A living thing breathes while one void of life does not, and the Jewish people understood that God had imparted His own divine life into all people, making all people images and likenesses of their heavenly Father.

The second use of *spirit* appears when selected individuals needed to be made more godlike in order to accomplish some task for the people of Israel. For instance, when Samuel anoints Saul as a prophet, He promises him that the power of God will be with him as he continues his journey as Israel's leader: "After that you will come to Gibeath-elohim, where the Philistine garrison is located. As you enter that city, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the

² St. Basil the Great, *Hexameron*, sec. 6; New Advent translation, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/32012.htm>. The New Advent website makes public the multi-volume Ante-Nicene Fathers, the Nicene Fathers, and Post-Nicene Fathers which arose out of the Oxford Movement. These volumes were English translations of the Fathers prepared by many scholars, British mainly (including St. John Henry Cardinal Newman), between 1886 and 1900. Philip Schaff was the first editor and he later asked Henry Wace to assist in this work when the second—and more expanded—series was commissioned.

high place. They will be preceded by lyres, tambourines, flutes, and harps, and will be in prophetic ecstasy. The spirit of the Lord will rush upon you, and you will join them in their prophetic ecstasy and will become a changed man. When these signs have come to pass, do whatever lies to hand, because God is with you" (1 Sm 10:5–7).

Christians read the Old Testament as the foreshadowing of all the perfect works God will do in Jesus Christ (that is what makes it "Old"). Here we can hear a faint glimpse of Mary's words to the wine stewards at Cana, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). For when the Spirit of God draws near, we are changed in that we now know we walk with God and have the confidence to overcome any trial or tribulation. As is the case with Saul here, the Spirit changes us, makes us more like God, enabling us to do supernatural things in accord with His own designs.

Second, this is how the Spirit is also depicted in the Old Testament as the one responsible for ordering creation and delivering the Father's bounty to those who hunger and thirst. The Spirit nourishes and protects. He redirects the sinner and even longs to renew all of creation to the Father's greater glory. Or as the Psalmist puts it: "All of these look to you to give them food in due time. When you give it to them, they gather; when you open your hand, they are well filled. When you hide your face, they panic. Take away their breath, they perish and return to the dust. Send forth your spirit, they are created and you renew the face of the earth" (Ps 104:27–30).

In the Old Testament, the Spirit is the principle of our existence, the One who constantly renews creation and directs the affairs of God's people. He thus empowers God's warriors (see Nm 27:18), judges (see Jdgs 13:25), and prophets, like Ezekiel: "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you so that you walk in my statutes, observe my ordinances, and keep them" (Ez 36:26–27). The Spirit of God was understood by the Jewish people to be a living extension of their one, true God, a moving and vivifying presence who gathered God's chosen ones into a fortified and flourishing people.

Who gave you the ability to contemplate the beauty of the skies, the course of the sun, the round moon, the millions of stars, the harmony and rhythm that issue from the world as from a lyre, the return of the seasons, the alternation of the months, the demarcation of day and night, the fruits of the earth, the vastness of the air, the ceaseless motion of the waves, the sound of the wind? Who gave you the rain, the soil to cultivate, food to eat, arts, houses, laws, a republic, cultivated manners, friendship with your fellows?³

When was the last time you prayed outside? Have you taken the time lately to gaze upon the miraculous structure of some natural object, say, a tree or flower? Has nature's politicization by the "Green Movement" sapped your wonder in nature?

Are you able to gaze at the stars at night? Pay attention to all the various colors and smells and sights that surround us. All of these are God's first gifts to us, the beauty of His creation.

List three times, places or experiences you hold dear in your memory as times that God has spoken to you most powerfully of His Spirit's love for you:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

³ Gregory of Nazianzus, *On Love for the Poor*, 23, in Olivier Clément, *Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1995), 17.

The third use of *spirit* is more reminiscent of what Christians imagine when they think of Pentecost. While the Holy Spirit is not yet totally understood as a separate and distinct divine person in the Old Testament (lacking any theology of the Trinity), the Jewish people do set the stage to understand God's Spirit as the uncreated expression of God's care. For instance, as God was forming His people, He begins to work on the malicious Pharaoh through Joseph, "a man so endowed with the spirit of God" (Gn 41:38). The same Spirit came upon Samson as he needed to achieve some superhuman feat: "But the spirit of the Lord rushed upon Samson, and he tore the lion apart barehanded, as one tears a young goat. Without telling his father or mother what he had done" (Jgs 14:6). Or, more notably, David was anointed king with the Spirit who promised never to leave him: "Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed him in the midst of his brothers, and from that day on, the spirit of the Lord rushed upon David" (1 Sm 16:13). Only through the Holy Spirit could a man come to repent and compose Psalm 51 after committing adultery and murdering the rightful husband of his concubine.

Even in the Old Testament, then, the Spirit of God imparts not only a natural life into us but a supernatural life as well. The Spirit enables us to speak the truth when difficult, to live each day when we feel like giving up, to overcome barriers and to live with purpose, integrity, and joy. Yet the Church Fathers could not equate the Old Testament figures' encounters with the Holy Spirit with the power of Pentecost. While the prophets and patriarchs, judges and kings of Israel were no doubt inspired by God, a new level of divine union was inaugurated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Spirit does not happen upon the scene only after Christ's ascension, for He has been at work since the foundation of the world:

Therefore it is one and the same Spirit who is in the prophets, and in the apostles. He was, however, in the former only for awhile; whereas he abides in the latter forever. In other words, he is in the prophets but not to remain always in them; in the apostles, that he might abide in them forever. He has been

apportioned to the former in moderation; to the latter, he has been wholly poured out; he was sparingly given to the one, upon the other lavishly bestowed. He was not however, manifested before the Lord's Resurrection but conferred by Christ's Resurrection. In fact, Christ said, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate that he may be with you forever, the Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:16–17). . . . Since the Lord was about to go to heaven, he had to give the Paraclete to his disciples, that he might not leave them orphans (cf. Jn 14:18), as it were, and abandon them without a defender or some sort of guardian. That would not have been proper at all.⁴

When you try to picture yourself in the presence of the Holy Spirit, what images or feelings surface?

What areas in your life do you need the Holy Spirit to reveal Himself right now?

Have you ever read the Old Testament? Is this something to which the Spirit might be calling you to study?

⁴ Novatian, *On the Holy Spirit*, 29, in *Novatian: The Trinity*, trans. Russell DeSimone (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1972), 100–1.

This imparting of the Spirit's supernatural life becomes all the clearer when we "fast forward" many centuries up to the first Pentecost. Here in first century Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit brings us all back to the very first moment of creation. The Holy Spirit again descends and watches vigilantly over what God has now formed. This time, however, it is not simply creation in general but His newly-formed apostolic and Marian Church, a people singularly known and called out of the world to be living icons of God on earth.

All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. . . .

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. (Acts 1:14; 2:1–4)

With her head now fully ascended into heaven, the Body of Christ—the visible Church—can now receive the Holy Spirit in a new and definitive way. Now the Holy Spirit opens up God's nature to us even more, revealing our God as a Trinity available to all persons in any part of the globe, uniting them in one common language of Love: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19).

We who live in this post-Pentecostal life of the Church sometimes forget that God has revealed His personal essence as a Trinity of Love carefully and slowly. When first asked who He was, God simply told Moses, "I am who am" (Ex 3:14). This name provided centuries of philosophical reflection, seeing in it the one unique being whose very nature it is to exist. As the chosen people journeyed through the centuries, however, God began to show His truest

nature to us gently, so as not to disturb a strict Monotheism while granting glimpses into His triune life. “The Lord sent the Paraclete because, since human weakness could not receive everything at once, it might gradually be directed and regulated and brought to perfection of discipline by the Lord’s vicar, the Holy Spirit.”⁵ Ever mindful of our littleness, God gently reveals the fullness of his triune life in a time and in a manner He knows allows us the greatest opportunity to understand it properly.

The Church Fathers thus argued that God revealed the Trinity in accord with our capacity to receive such a truth:

The Old Testament has manifested the Father clearly, the Son only dimly. The New Testament has revealed the Son and implied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. But today the Holy Spirit lives among us and makes himself more clearly known. It would actually have been dangerous to proclaim openly the Son while the divinity of the Father was not fully acknowledged, and then, before the divinity of the Son was accepted, to add as it were the extra burden of the Holy Spirit’s divinity. . . . So it was more fitting that by adding a little at a time and, as David says, by ascending from glory to glory, the splendor of the Trinity should shine forth progressively.⁶

In so doing, Jesus began to teach about the Holy Spirit in whom He was anointed and whom He would pledge to His disciples: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:15–17). With this introduction, Jesus has finally felt confident that His followers would understand that He has never acted alone: they know He has come from the Father and now He wants them to know He is sending “another Advocate.”

⁵ Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, 1, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IVb on John 11-21*, trans. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 206.

⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Fifth Theological Oration*, sec. 31.26, in *Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 61.

But now I am going to the one who sent me, and not one of you asks me, "Where are you going?" But because I told you this, grief has filled your hearts. But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes he will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and condemnation: sin, because they do not believe in me; righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; condemnation, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. (Jn 16:5–15)

Have you ever thought about God's revealing truths carefully and only in accord with our ability to understand? Could you see this same dynamic in your own life, that God's not showing you something until you were ready to receive it?

Does it comfort you to know that your Advocate before the Father is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love? He sees every pulse of your heart, every secret smile and joy, every desire you have ever had. Does this truth of who you truly are before God console or frighten you?

The word *Advocate* is often translated as “Comforter” or “Paraclete” as well. “When he proclaims and promises the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus calls him the ‘Paraclete,’ literally, ‘he who is called to one’s side,’ *ad-vocatus*. ‘Paraclete’ is commonly translated by ‘consoler,’ and Jesus is the first consoler. The Lord also called the Holy Spirit ‘the Spirit of truth’” (CCC 692).

The words translated as “Comforter” or “Consoler,” whether from the Latin *Advocatus* or the Greek Paraclete, were originally found in ancient legal terminology and refer to a trusted confidant who would stand by your side and intercede for you before a tribunal. This witness was someone whom you could trust with all that was involved in your particular case and someone who would appeal to the judge on your behalf in the most charitable and forgiving manner possible.

The root of both these terms for the Holy Spirit (*vocare* in Latin, *kalein* in Greek) has the sense “to call,” reminding us that God calls each of us by name (see Is 43:1). The Spirit of God knows us better than we know ourselves, loves us more than we love ourselves, and He longs to put right all the messiness of our busy lives. Or as St. Augustine famously wrote, God is even closer to us than we are to ourselves—“more intimately present to me than my innermost being, and higher than the highest peak of my spirit.”⁷ This is the call we have received through the Holy Spirit’s indwelling: to know that we have been brought into an intimate relationship with God, so intimate we have now become, through grace, what Jesus Christ is by nature—a child of the Father.

When I think of the profusion of the names of the Spirit, I am seized with dread: Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ, Spirit of Adoption, and on and on. He renews us in baptism and resurrection. He blows where he wills. Source of light and life, he makes of me a temple, he makes me divine. . . . Everything God does is done by the Spirit. He multiplies himself in tongues of fire and he multiplies his gifts by raising up preachers, apostles,

⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.6.11, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 83.

prophets, pastors, teachers. . . . He is another Comforter . . . as if he were another God.⁸

Does the Spirit's knowledge of your entire self bring you comfort or unease? Why?

Do you feel prompted to tell God anything about yourself at this moment? What is it?

“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’ The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:14–17).

That is why Jesus teaches us how to pray beginning by calling upon our common Father in heaven. “He was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.’ He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come’” (Lk 11:1–2). In this brief snapshot of Jesus’s own prayer life, there are four points worth mentioning.

The first is that Jesus, the eternally begotten Son of God, *prays*. Jesus prays. So, if the One who is forever one with the Father and who is forever in heaven prays, how much more should we? We are

⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Fifth Theological Oration*, sec. 29, in *Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 73.

funny amphibians, made for heaven but caught up in life on earth. We need to make the time and the effort to uncover each day our true vocation as saints.

Second, that is why we can ask to learn to pray. “If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” (Lk 11:13). That is exactly what you are doing in this at-home retreat. We can ask the Holy Spirit to show us the best ways we can commune with the Father—with our morning coffee or not, inside or outside, with some music or only silence, and so on.

Third, notice Jesus goes to “a certain place.” That is what we discussed at the beginning of our retreat: be intentional, pick a time and a place where prayer can really “happen” for you. Be specific and purposeful that the time you and the Spirit have decided on is both optimal and practical.

And the final lesson leads us to a much larger point: calling upon our Father’s name as something made holy or “hallowed.” Jesus Christ is the one naturally-born Son, but we are the Father’s adopted sons and daughters—two different ways of being a child of God, but both children all the same. And how does our brother Jesus tell us to begin? By acknowledging the holiness of the Father’s name: *Our Father, hallowed be your name!* Have you ever thought of a name as holy? We shall discuss this later in the fifth week, but here lies an ancient insight: Having access to one’s name shows a particular intimacy or grasp of who that person is. To know another’s name is to have a certain “in” with them, maybe even a certain type of power over them. To share your truest name with another is an invitation toward trust and the possibility of an ongoing relationship.

As a definite person of the Most Holy Trinity, the Spirit is to be called upon as such, a distinct and nameable individual. As persons, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit ask to be known as each is. That is why there is an entire commandment teaching us about the holiness of a name. When we are in an intimate relationship with another, we not only know his or her name but might even have a special name used only between us. There are of course levels

of intimacy measured by a name we use for another: addressing someone as Mr. or Mrs. is different from calling them Joseph or Mary, and a much different level when that person could be Hon or Sweetie, a special name reserved for a very intimate few.

Each time you pray the Our Father, then, think why you call God's name *holy* or *hallowed*. God has granted you access to His very being, allowing you to call upon Him. That admittance is not something we should ever use flippantly or rely on simply to release anger or frustration. "You shall not invoke the name of the LORD, your God, in vain. For the LORD will not leave unpunished anyone who invokes his name in vain" (Ex 20:7). Preaching on the Sermon on the Mount, Saint Augustine put it this way:

This petition is not made as if God's name were not hallowed but so that people may hallow it, that is, so that God may be so well known to them that they would not consider anything else more hallowed which they would more dare to offend. . . . And so his name is said to be holy whenever it is spoken of with reverence and with fear of giving offence. This is what is now happening when, by making it known throughout the different nations, the Gospel proclaims the name of the one God through the mediation of his Son.⁹

Knowing God has revealed His name to us as something holy changes us, not Him. It changes us because, finally in our lives, there is something holy, absolute, and beyond utility or flippancy. It is an encounter that is to be revered and adored, and thus life-changing. In realizing deeply that God is your *Abba* is to bring about a new life for you, now as a son or daughter of a heavenly Father:

"Pray thus," Jesus says: "Our Father who are in the heavens." Anybody who is renewed, reborn, and restored to his God by grace, first of all says, "Father," because he is now become a son or daughter. It is said: "He came to his own, and his own did not receive him. To as many as did receive him he gave them power

⁹ Augustine, *Sermon on the Mount*, 2.5.19, in *The New Testament I&II*, trans. Michael Campbell (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2014), 78.

to become the children of God, who believe his name” (Jn 1:11). Whoever therefore believes in his name is made a child of God, and hence should begin to give thanks and show himself a child of God as the names his Father as God in heaven. He bears witness also, among the first of his words at his rebirth, that he renounces his earthly and fleshy father and acknowledge that he has begun to have the Father in heaven as his only Father.¹⁰

While the Old Testament warns against using God’s name in a offhand or glib manner, Jesus, in the New Testament, invites us to call God Father. Even our earthly fathers are not wholly “father,” as they are first a son. By extension, of course, the name of the Son and the Holy Spirit are equally as holy, to be invoked only when calling out to God in loving faith. These are not names to be bandied about when frustrated or released only when angry as so many do. “You shall not invoke the name of the LORD, your God, in vain” (Dt 5:11; see also CCC 2142). The Church Fathers linked the first two commandments, making God the only one worthy of our adoration and His name not to be used in vain, something we spurt out when irritated. For if God were truly my only God and Lord, I would not “use” Him only when I was in need of release or, even worse, feeling like cursing a situation or another person.

What in your life do you consider “holy,” that about which you are never flippant or dismissive?

How does genuflecting and kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament make you feel? Do you see this as the one place of absolute worship in your life?

¹⁰ Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Lord’s Prayer* 9, in *Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen On the Lord’s Prayer*, trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Press, 2004), 70–71; slightly adjusted.

You may not think of yourself as having idols, but where do you place most of your trust or spend most of your energy when worried? Is it your finances, your social status, your physical health, your technology? Can you place all of these very real and important concerns in your Father's will, in His Son's pierced hands?

In the Church's unbroken theology, the presence of the Holy Spirit elevates us into the status of God's children. We are no longer servants who obey God out of fear of punishment; we are no longer soldiers who do what is asked only for the sake of reward. No, we are now sons and daughters, sharing the same Spirit as God Himself: "As proof that you are children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God" (Gal 4:6-7).

We would be overwhelmed in our awareness of being slaves, we would disintegrate in our earthly condition, if the authority of the Father himself and the Spirit of his Son were not rousing us to make this acclamation. "God sent," it says, "the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" Our minds grow faint, our flesh falters at divine matters, if God who gives the command were not to carry out himself what he commands to be done. When have mortals dared to call God their Father except now, when the deepest recesses of the human being are enlivened by power from heaven?¹¹

Have you ever been totally honest with yourself and asked, "Why do I call myself a Christian?" Is it because of your fear of hell (slave) or reward of heaven (soldier)? Is it because you

¹¹ St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon 71,3*, in *St. Peter Chrysologus: Selected Sermons*, trans. William Palardy (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 286.

simply want to be one with the Lord (son or daughter) and thus love and be loved by Him, no matter what He asks of you?

Seeing that there is such an order and unity in the Holy Trinity, who could separate either the Son from the Father, or the Spirit from the Son or from the Father himself? Who could be so audacious as to say that the Trinity is unlike itself and different in nature? Or that the Son is foreign to the Father in substance? Or that the Spirit is estranged from the Son? . . . First, let him divide the Radiance from the Light or the Wisdom from the Wise One, or else tell us how these things are possible. But if this cannot be done, much more is it the audacity of the insane to ask such questions about God. For the divinity is not handed down through logical demonstrations and arguments, as has been said, but by faith and by pious reasoning joined with reverence.¹²

As we witness here, fourth century rhetoric was powerful and to the punch. Who would be so “insane” and so bold as to tell the Holy Spirit that He and the Father and the Son were not one? This is audacious, to separate the only three Divine Persons; in fact, Saint Athanasius warns it’s not even possible! Do you know what is audacious? When we call God our Father: “At the Savior’s command, and formed by divine teaching we dare (*audemus dicere*) to say . . .”

¹² Athanasius, *First Letter to Serapion* 1.20.1-3, in *Works on the Spirit: Athanasius and Didymus*, trans. Mark DelCogliano et al (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 84.

Pray the *Our Father* slowly and see if any one word or phrase resonates deeply within you.

How does it feel to know and call upon God as “Father”? Do any important images from your own earthly father come to mind?

At this point in our retreat, you might feel excited. You may be wondering if anything is “happening,” or if you are doing enough. Be assured: Simply desiring to give this time to God is the beginning of greater holiness. We may not always be consistent, and we rarely do great feats of love, but we can long for God, and in His gracious mercy, maybe that is all He is asking of you right now. “The entire life of a good Christian is a holy desire. What you desire, however, you don’t yet see. But by desiring you are made large enough, so that, when there comes what you should see, you may be filled.”¹³ Of course, growing in union with the Holy Spirit will prove to be more than a holy desire, but we are just beginning. For now, rest assured that the Lord delights in you and that you are on the right track.

Whom do you love most tenderly? Name them.

Are your actions consistent with your holy desires for those you love?

¹³ Augustine of Hippo, *Homilies on First John* 4.6, in *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2008), 69.

How do you interact with that person, those persons, on a daily basis? Do you ever take them for granted or take your frustrations out on those you have in mind?

Do you see your love for these persons not as a projection of your own emotions but as a real manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our lives? If so, do you love with the Spirit's virtue and selflessness in mind or do you still love based on your own feelings and emotions?

Do you ever divide your loves into ones that are "natural" and ones that are "holy"? If so, try to reunite those people into one love, into one God-given desire for greater union and charity toward all those people God has put into your life.

The Spirit testifies to the Father's love and longing to dwell even more intimately in our lives. "Man, however, by the power of the Spirit and the spiritual regeneration, not only comes to the measures of the first Adam, but is made greater than he. Man is deified. . . . As the Lord put on the body, leaving behind all principality and power,

so Christians put on the Holy Ghost, and are at rest.”¹⁴ As the Son of God who was once spirit only put on flesh in the womb of Mary, we who are embodied since conception are invited to put on the Spirit at baptism. He is the “rest” that our restless hearts seek, the way into the Trinity for whom we have been created.

Part of a retreat is to examine the past year in one’s life and ask: Where you have found God and where have I felt restless? Take some time to jot down the most memorable blessings of this past year as well as to list some place where stress and anxiety have been unfortunately overwhelming.

¹⁴ Macarius of Egypt, *Spiritual Homily* no. 26.2 and .15, in *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of Macarius the Egyptian*, trans. A. J. Mason (New York: MacMillan Company, 1921), 185, 192.