

CATECHISM FOR ADULTS:

IX. 'And in the Holy Ghost'

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AT a first reading the articles that come at the end of the Creed seem to be just isolated statements. In fact it is not difficult to discover a unifying principle. The final section of the Creed begins with the words, 'I believe in the Holy Ghost'. This is the clue, because all the other articles express our belief in the fruits of the creative activity of the Holy Spirit. 'The Catholic Church' is the new community, which has corporate life in the Spirit: 'remission of sins' is effected through the Spirit; 'the resurrection of the body' is the crown, the final achievement of the working of the Spirit.

The first Christians were well aware of this and in consequence laid great emphasis on the relation between the Spirit and the Church, for they recognized that it is through the fruits of the Spirit that the Spirit itself is discerned.

St Gregory Nazianzen wrote, 'The New Testament revealed the Son and implied the divinity of the Spirit. Today the Spirit dwells among us and makes himself more clearly known.' It is by living in the Christian community that a man is brought to a closer knowledge of the Holy Spirit. 'Dost thou believe in the Holy Spirit?' ran the old baptismal question. It is in the Church, the creation of the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit is discovered.

The Christian is one who has been 'born again of water and the Holy Ghost', for baptism is 'the bath of regeneration' (II Cor. 1. 22). This birth receives its 'seal' in the sacrament of Confirmation, 'by which the Spirit is poured forth abundantly upon us', so that the Christian 'filled with the Spirit' speaks as a witness to the life that stirs within his soul. In the Holy Spirit lies the source of that 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, temperateness' (Gal. 5. 22) by which the soul, in the fellowship of the Church, grows to spiritual maturity.

The Spirit is not simply a gift or a power. Often enough in Scripture the word 'Spirit' is used to mean a vital principle, and very frequently it is used of an activity, influence, or gift. But these senses are to be distinguished from the one, often indicated

by the use of the article, which refers to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a Person, 'the Lord and Giver of Life'. Fifty days after the first Easter—at Pentecost—'they were filled with the Holy Ghost' (Acts 2. 4). At this point the Holy Ghost reveals himself, and his creative presence indwelling in the souls of his disciples transforms them into temples of the Holy Ghost, thus creating that living temple which is the Church.

Pentecost was, as St Peter recognized, the great day of the Lord spoken of by the prophet Joel (Acts 2. 16). Jesus 'being exalted . . . by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, hath poured forth this which you see and hear'. (Acts 2, 33.) 'The Spirit manifested at Pentecost, and in the Church, is the same Spirit that 'spoke by the prophets'. It was because the Spirit rested upon them that Moses, Samuel, Elias, and *Isaias taught the people. It was for the Spirit of God that the Psalmist prayed. Ezechiel asked that a 'new Spirit' might replace 'the stony heart' and saw that God's Spirit would come and bring life to the dead bones. (Ezechiel 11, 14. 36 & 37). The Spirit was to be the greatest Messianic gift, the seal of God's presence.*

In the New Testament the generalized character of this reference is removed. The Holy Spirit is a person. 'And I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete' (advocate or consoler) 'that he may abide with you for ever: the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, nor knoweth him. But you shall know him because he shall abide with you, and shall be in you.' (John 14. 16-17.) 'The Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you'. (John 14. 26.) 'When he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will teach you all truth. For he shall not speak of himself, but what things soever he shall hear, he shall speak. And all things that are to come, he shall show you. He shall glorify me: because he shall receive of mine and shall shew it to you.' (John 16. 13-14.) 'If I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you.'

The Comforter, of whom our Lord speaks, is the Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost to the disciples in the Upper Room. It is the Holy Spirit who teaches the Church, it is by the Holy Spirit that we recognize Christ as Redeemer; 'No man can say the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost' (I Cor. 12, 3). It is the Holy Spirit

who unites us to God so closely that St Paul can say 'you have received the Spirit of the adoption of sons, whereby we cry Abba' (Father). (Romans 8. 15.) It is by the Holy Spirit that the spiritual man, the true Christian, judges, for through the Spirit he shares in the wisdom of God. It is by the living presence of the Holy Spirit, who is God's love of himself, that Christians are able to fulfil the new commandment of Christ 'that you love one another as I have loved you'. (John 14, 34.)

The Christian lives in a community created by the action of the Holy Spirit. This pouring forth of the divine love, of which Pentecost is the sign and witness, creates a unity of love, for it is the 'charity of God' that 'is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost' (Romans 5. 5). The union is first one of assimilation to God so that the Christian becomes an adoptive member of the family of God; 'whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God' (Romans 8, 12). The hidden, infinitely mysterious work of the Holy Spirit is creative of our union with God, and thus sets up that whole context on which our spiritual life depends. Since the living Spirit is present, man is set free from his bondage to the world and his condemnation by the law, because as one full of the divine love, he is free: free to act in the spiritual sphere as a responsible and responsive agent.

It is, too, 'in the Holy Spirit' that the Christian prays, 'for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings' (Romans 8. 26). The Church always prays to God the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Ghost. The prayer of the Church is caught up, as it were, into that communication of love which is the life of the Blessed Trinity.

The Church lives by the Holy Spirit. 'What', wrote St Augustine, 'the soul is to our body, that is the Holy Ghost in Christ's body, the Church', or to change the metaphor, with St Thomas, 'The heart has a certain hidden power, and therefore the Holy Ghost, who invisibly vivifies and unites the Church, is compared to the heart.'

The Word was proclaimed in the life of Christ in the Word made flesh: yet this proclamation was made in the Spirit. It is, too, only the Spirit which can penetrate the hidden depths of the life of the Word and apprehend who he is. It is the same Holy Spirit living in the Church which provides, as it were, the medium

of Christian apprehension. The Word of God, the objectively given Christian faith, is handed over, generation after generation, by the Church. Its fulness is contained in the Scriptures which are the book of the Church. As an object apprehended, however, this faith, these writings, are only apprehensible in the Church, because it is only as given in the Spirit, and as illumined by the Spirit, that human words and symbols become the living Word of God.

It is because of this that St Paul makes his boast: 'We have the mind of Christ' (I Cor. 2. 16). If it be asked how, the answer is simple: 'For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God' (I Cor. 12. 10).

Living in and by the Spirit, the Church both presents and interprets the Scriptures: here as everywhere else there is interplay between the Word and the Spirit. Scripture would be dead without tradition, for it is tradition, the living voice of the Spirit in the Church, which draws out the meaning of Scripture, for as St Thomas says, 'The Holy Spirit, who is the principal author of Scripture, understood much more than the exegetes can explain or discover'. Tradition, in the sense of conclusions accepted, is simply the judgment of the inspired mind of the Church.

By the Holy Spirit, too, the soul is led nearer to God. Caught up by the Love of God, man searches in the Spirit into the deep things of God. As the lover is drawn to the beloved, so, in the Spirit, is the soul drawn to God. The coming of the Holy Ghost is the beginning of the pilgrimage of the soul towards the vision of God.