

## From the desk of Fr. Jim

### GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

One of the themes of the Biblical writers is the idea of “ages,” periods of time in which there are dramatically different events that are intended to bring about particular results. Associated with these ages are particular promises for the future. For example, during the age of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) God promises the emergence of a new nation, the nation of God’s chosen people. These ages also include certain struggles. God’s promise to Abraham is linked with particular obstacles to the fulfillment of that promise. Abraham needs a child in order to be the patriarch of a great nation, but God insures, through the obstacle of childlessness, that Abraham must depend on God alone. This is an example of another of the characteristics of these ages in the Bible. They include promise, but they also include struggle to see that promise complete.

As the Scriptures advance in their understanding of God’s presence in the lives of his chosen servants, there is an increase in the mention of God’s “Spirit,” especially at the juncture of one age leading to another. As the Old Testament closes, the activity of the Spirit seems to increase dramatically. Zechariah and Elizabeth, John the Baptist’s parents, are people who are guided by the Holy Spirit whose power is manifestly operative in their life. The same is true for the Temple priest, Simeon and the prophetess, Anna whose whole lives are wrapped in the power of the Spirit of God. God the Holy Spirit informs and directs their life. John the Baptist as the herald of Christ is an intimate of the Holy Spirit:

*But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of (the) Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord.” (Luke 1:13-17)*

Certainly, among these who are the true associates of the Holy Spirit and in a preeminent position is the Blessed Mother of Jesus. The unique character of her role is described in this way:

*And the angel said to her in reply, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. (Luke 1:35)*

The utterly unique character of the event announced by the angel cannot be overstated. This is not merely the personal history of a famous man. It is the beginning of a new age, indeed a “new creation”. The echo of the description of the Genesis account of creation is no accident.

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)*

With the ministry of Jesus, we have an even greater expectation of the intervention of the Holy Spirit, and the key moments demonstrate a flurry of activity. Jesus' identity and mission is revealed and the seal of the Father's approval is the descent of the Holy Spirit.

*After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:21-22)*

Because of the brevity of this reflection, all the references to the participation of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of Jesus cannot be recalled, even by title. Suffice it to say that the new age of Jesus Christ ushers in the age of the Spirit. To be complete and to assist us in understanding our own life as the Church, we must see that ours is the age of the Spirit as well. Paul describes his missionary work in the context of the Holy Spirit's manifest direction. Now, through the work of the Church, especially her sacramental life, the Holy Spirit continues to act for the salvation of all.

The pinnacle of our life as Christians is achieved in this new age of the Spirit. The sign of his work among us is the love that we have for God and one another. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us with the very love which is the description of the Divine Community of God.

*Come down, O love divine, seek Thou this soul of mine,  
And visit it with Thine own ardor glowing.  
O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear,  
And kindle it, Thy holy flame bestowing.*

*O let it freely burn, til earthly passions turn  
To dust and ashes in its heat consuming;  
And let Thy glorious light shine ever on my sight,  
And clothe me round, the while my path illuming.*

*Let holy charity mine outward vesture be,  
And lowliness become mine inner clothing;  
True lowliness of heart, which takes the humbler part,  
And o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.*

*And so the yearning strong, with which the soul will long,  
Shall far outpass the power of human telling;  
For none can guess its grace, till he become the place  
Wherein the Holy Spirit makes His dwelling.*

**("Discendi, Amor santo", Bianca of Siena, 1434, Translated by R.F. Littledale)**