

## The Holy Spirit and the Eucharist: A Literary Journey

Paper read by Jo de Groot, Dip Ed, BSW, PhD, at The Academy of the Word, Sydney, 7 March 2010

### INTRODUCTION

My curiosity about this topic started when I wanted to find links in the Bible and Church teaching between the Holy Spirit and that most important and central of sacraments, the Eucharist. At first glance the only obvious reference in the Mass was the doxology at the end of the Eucharistic prayer. However, still curious, I found myself scrutinizing all the references to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and then all in the New Testament, to see if indeed there *was* any connection there. I then perused O'Brien's book 'Catholicism' as also the Catechism of the Catholic Church, as well as the writings of St Elizabeth of the Trinity. I can honestly say: I found so much richness that I am delighted to present this teaching today. The method I am using is that of a literary journey, so, I now invite you to join me in my journey. However, before we set off, let me remind you that the Mass may be seen as three things: 1. Event; 2. Celebration; and 3. Infinite Reality. My intention in this paper is to keep to the structure of the Mass, but loosely, as sometimes you might find we have deviated quite a distance before coming back.

### THE LITERARY JOURNEY

We start the Mass, as we know of course, with the words of the sign of the cross: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen'. We acknowledge, with those words that we are present at The Mass acting in and by the blessed Trinity. We together with all created things, have our existence in the bosom of God.

After that introduction, we find a regular mention of the Holy Spirit on Sundays in the Nicene Creed as follows: 'We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together, is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.' There we have in a nutshell what we believe about the Holy Spirit. The French Carmelite nun, St Elizabeth of the Trinity, explains in the first of her spiritual treatises that 'the Spirit of love presides over all of God's works' (De Meester, 1984:110). I believe, therefore, one could say the Holy Spirit presides over the people of God as they celebrate the Eucharist. Each of the first three statements will be elaborated in other parts of this paper. Right now I will say something more about point 4: 'who spoke by the prophets'. I went to have a look at the references to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, wondering whether I would find anything connecting Him to the Mass.

### OLD TESTAMENT

I did not find a direct link, but in the Old Testament I found we learn about the personality of the Holy Spirit. By 'personality' I mean the things he does, or did. We learn in Zechariah (4:6) that the Holy Spirit is all-powerful; in Haggai (2:5) that He

stays with those God has chosen; in Joel (2:28) that He will be poured out on anyone [whatever their rank in society]; in Ezra (8:3) He will give life and guide God's people home, (which for the Jews meant the promised land but for us, heaven); again in Ezra (8:3) He gives visions and occasionally transports a prophet geographically; and in Isaiah (44:3) we hear He will bless his people. The prophet Isaiah also predicts God will put his Holy Spirit on Jesus who will bring justice (Is.42:1), and we learn that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will bring fruitfulness (32:15). In Psalm 139:7 we learn that once God's Holy Spirit takes hold of us we can never escape, while in Psalm 104:30 that He will bring New Life, renew the face of the earth. Lastly, in Nehemiah 9:20 we are told He will give out wisdom and provide bodily sustenance.

We know, of course, that all these actions and provisions for our earthly journey are given in New Testament times as well. We celebrate them in the Eucharist: We today as we attend Mass, can have trust in God's power for our good, trust He will stay with us and not forsake us, will share himself with anyone who has an open heart, will guide us, use us, bless us as a people, is giving us Jesus continually through the once-for-all sacrifice of Calvary. He will never let us be lost, provide for our bodily and spiritual needs and continue to renew the face of the earth. So let us then move on to examine the New Testament texts.

## NEW TESTAMENT

Here I found descriptions of the central action in history of the Holy Spirit and the Word who is Jesus Christ, in the Death, the Resurrection and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

As I scrutinized the texts in the New Testament about the action of the Holy Spirit, I found the following text in the book of Revelation (4:1-5), '...and the same voice I heard before, spoke to me like a trumpet blast. The voice said: "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this." And instantly I was in the Spirit (or in spirit), and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones – like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow. ...' Here we have a visionary affirmation, i.e. an experiential account of the working of the Holy Spirit in and from the Blessed Trinity, or the Godhead. The Spirit not only *speaks* of the Father and the Word but He *shows* God to human beings, in this case the writer of the Book of Revelation, in the visionary mode.

In Revelation 3:6; we are urged to listen to what the Spirit is saying, 'Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what He is saying to the churches'. There is an open invitation to each one of us to attend to the Liturgy of the Word, the first half of the Mass.

In Revelation 22:17; there is a beautiful description of what we are actually doing at Mass. We are co-operating as the Bride of Jesus together with the Holy Spirit asking Jesus to come, as both 'The Spirit and the Bride say "Come"'. We co-operate with the Holy Spirit to invite Jesus to come on the altar. And moreover, we are told in the

Epistle of James (4:5-6) that that Spirit is jealous of us, the Bride, and gives us the grace to be pure.

In 1Jn5:8; we are told that we have our life in God through three witnesses, all in agreement: 'the Spirit, the water and the blood – and all three agree'. At Mass we come to celebrate all those three witnesses: the Holy Spirit, the water that flowed from the side of Christ as he hung on the cross at Calvary and hence the waters of our baptism, and the blood poured forth from Jesus' body, poured forth potentially for the salvation of the whole human race, and in actuality for all who put their faith in Him.

Hebrews 9:14 confirms the divine pact between the Holy Spirit and the Word when we read, 'For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.' Jesus' humanity was empowered to carry out this all-important task of our salvation through the Holy Spirit. By our participation in the Mass, that sacrifice is brought into our very beings by their eternal co-operation joined to their historical co-operation on Calvary 2000 years ago.

About the historical Jesus we learn: 'For He is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit.' (Jn3:34). Jesus himself was enlightened by the Holy Spirit at his baptism in the Jordan River. St Matthew (12:18) tells us that God the Father spoke at Jesus' baptism saying: 'Look at my servant, whom I have chosen. He is my beloved, who pleases me. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations.' It is through the Holy Spirit that Jesus will proclaim justice. And Jesus tells his disciples as he sends them out to preach, 'For it is not you who will be speaking – it will be the Spirit of my Father speaking through you.' He is speaking to them from experience.

St Luke tells us, 'Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil for forty days.' (Lk.4:1-2) Jesus was intimately accompanied by the Holy Spirit all through his life and indeed in his passing and his rising. As St Paul tells us, 'Jesus was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ the Lord.' (Rom1:4). It is those historical events we celebrate at the Eucharist.

#### THE NATURE OF THE CELEBRATION

We think about the Mass as a sacrifice of praise with lively liturgies and singing wherever and whenever possible. Here we are inspired by St Paul who writes to his friends in Ephesus: 'Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts.' (Eph5:18).

We each are there at the Mass because we have been identified by Jesus as his own by giving us his Holy Spirit, as St Paul says in Ephesians (1:13), and also in Galatians

(6:8), we will harvest everlasting life from that same Spirit if we live to please the Spirit.

In that same letter we learn (Gal. 4:6) that since we have been given the Holy Spirit we are God's children and we call out to him 'Abba, Father'. We are God's heirs and inherit all He has to share with us. God has identified us as His own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts. (2Cor1:22).

No matter what our earthly differences, we all share the same Spirit once we are baptised into One Body, the Body of Christ. (1Cor12:13). We celebrate our unity in Christ when we come to Mass. As St Paul states: All of us together, we are the temple of God with the Spirit living in us. (1Cor3:16). Furthermore, he adds that our faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit. In (1Cor2:10) he tells us, 'All these things have been revealed to us by God's Holy Spirit, for His Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets,' and again, 'People become convinced of these things by miraculous signs and wonders and by the power of God's Spirit. (Rom15:19).

St Paul tells us: 'Now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus and because we belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed us from the power of sin that leads to death...letting our sinful nature control our mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control our mind leads to life and peace.' (Rom8:1-6). So much for what I found in the New Testament and indeed in the Bible.

#### FROM THE SUNDAY MISSAL

We now go to the Sunday Missal. I found a rich expression of the role of the Holy Spirit in the various prefaces for Mass. For the Feast of the Blessed Trinity, for example, we hear: 'You have revealed your glory as the glory also of your Son and of the Holy Spirit: three Persons equal in majesty, undivided in splendour, yet one Lord, one God.'(Missal, (Pr.43).

There is a beautiful summing up of the meaning of what we are doing at Mass in Preface VIII for ordinary times of the year. It reads 'When your children sinned and wandered far from your friendship, you reunited them with yourself through the blood of your Son and the power of the Holy Spirit. You gather them into your Church, to be one as you, Father, are one with your Son and the Holy Spirit. You call them to be your people, to praise your wisdom in all your works. You make them the Body of Christ and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.'

In Pr VI for ordinary times we hear, 'Your Holy Spirit dwelling in us, gives us on earth the hope of unending joy. Your gift of the Spirit, who raised Jesus from the dead, is the foretaste and promise of the paschal feast of heaven.'

In the Preface of Pentecost (No28) we hear, 'Today you sent the Holy Spirit on those marked out to be your children by sharing the life of your only Son, and so you brought the paschal mystery to its completion. Today we celebrate the great

beginning of your Church when the Holy Spirit made known to all peoples the one true God, and created from the many languages of man one voice to profess one faith...’

The Preface of the Presentation (No 49) tells us ‘Today your Son, who shares your eternal splendour, was presented in the temple, and revealed by the Spirit as the glory of Israel and the light of all peoples’.

Lastly, the Preface of the Dedication of a Church (No 53) states ‘Your house is a house of prayer and your presence makes it a place of blessing. You give us grace upon grace to build the temple of your Spirit, creating its beauty from the holiness of our lives.’

### EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS

In the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer we hear:

‘Lord, look upon this sacrifice which you have given to your Church; and by your Holy Spirit, gather all who share this one bread and one cup into the one body of Christ, a living sacrifice of praise.’

### OPENING PRAYERS

In the opening prayer of the Second Sunday of Easter we read ‘God of mercy, you wash away our sins in water, you give us new birth in the Spirit, and redeem us in the blood of Christ.’

### MASS READINGS

In the Gospel (Jn5:1-6) we read ‘Who can overcome the world? Only the man who believes that Jesus is the Son of God; Jesus Christ who came by water and blood, not with water only, but with water and blood; with the Spirit as another witness – since the Spirit is the truth.’

In the readings of the Feast of the Holy Trinity Year B, we are told in Romans 8:14, ‘Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God... We are heirs, co-heirs with Christ.’

In the Liturgy of the Feast of Corpus Christi we find in the Reading from Hebrews (9:11-15) ‘Now Christ has come as the high priest of all the blessings which were to come... The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer are sprinkled on those who have incurred defilement and they restore the holiness of their outward lives; how much more effectively the blood of Christ, who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the eternal Spirit, can purify our inner self from dead actions so that we do our service to the living God.’ This is again a pointer to the importance of celebrating the Eucharist so that we might enliven our faith, our sonship, that is, our position in the heart of the Blessed Trinity.

### THE CATHOLIC CATECHISM

The Catholic Catechism, imprimatured by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, tells us that the task of the redemption of the human race was a joint venture between the Word and the Spirit. The text explains: ‘When the Father sends his Word, he always sends his Breath, the original translation ‘Ruah’ meaning ‘breath’ or ‘wind’. In their joint mission, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct but inseparable. To be sure, it is Christ who is seen, the visible image of the invisible God, but it is the Spirit who reveals him.’(CC689).

The explanation continues: ‘Jesus is Christ, “anointed”, because the Spirit is his anointing, and everything that occurs from the incarnation onwards derives from this fullness. When Christ is finally glorified he can in turn send the Spirit from his place with the Father to those who believe in him: he communicates to them his glory, that is, the Holy Spirit who glorifies him. From that time on, this joint mission will be manifested in the children adopted by the Father in the Body of his Son: the mission of the Spirit of adoption is to unite them to Christ and make them live in him.’ (CC690).

#### FROM THE SAINTS

The Catechism gives us an explanation from St Fulgentius which reads: ‘Since Christ died for us out of love, when we celebrate the memorial of his death at the moment of sacrifice we ask that love may be granted to us by the coming of the Holy Spirit. We humbly pray that in the strength of this love by which Christ willed to die for us, we by receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, may be able to consider the world as crucified for us and to be ourselves as crucified to the world....Having received the gift of love, let us die to sin and live for God.’(CC1394).

Again from the Catechism we get a lovely explanation about the anointing of Jesus by the Spirit from St Gregory of Nyssa’s *De Spiritu Santo*, (16:PG 45 1321A-B) as follows: ‘The notion of anointing suggests...that there is no distance between the Son and the Spirit. Indeed, just as between the surface of the body and the anointing with oil neither reason nor sensation recognizes any intermediary, so the contact of the Son with the Spirit is immediate, so that anyone who would make contact with the Son by faith must first encounter the oil [Holy Spirit] by contact....the Spirit coming from all sides to those who approach the Son in faith.’

Again, we are taught that at the moment of transubstantiation ‘The Church asks the Father to send his Holy Spirit (or the power of his blessing) (Cf. Roman Missal EP1 Roman Canon 90) on the bread and wine so that by his power they may become the body and blood of Jesus Christ and so that those who take part in the Eucharist may be one body and one spirit.’ We are told the change happens by the power of the words, the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. (CC1353).

Further we read that we must consider that we have ‘communion with the flesh of the risen Christ, a flesh “given life and giving life through the Holy Spirit”

(Presbyterorum Ordinis 542), and so ‘preserves, increases and renews the life of grace received at Baptism.’ (CC1392).

The fact that Christ and the Holy Spirit have a joint mission for humanity is further clearly explained in the following words from the Catholic Catechism: ‘The mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is brought to completion in the Church, which is the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. This joint mission henceforth brings Christ’s faithful to share in his communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit prepares men and goes out to them with his grace, in order to draw them to Christ. The Spirit manifests the risen Lord to them, recalls his word to them and opens their minds to the understanding of his Death and Resurrection.

He [the Spirit] makes present the mystery of Christ, supremely in the Eucharist, in order to reconcile them, to bring them into communion with God, that they may “Bear much fruit” (Jn 15:8, 16) (CC737).

The Church’s mission, we are told, is not an addition to that of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but is its sacrament (its sign): in her whole being and in all her members, the Church is sent to announce God’s effective saving love to the human race.

## CONCLUSION

I will conclude our literary journey with the words of St Cyril of Alexandria who teaches:

*All of us who have received one and the same Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit, are in a sense blended together with one another and with God. For if Christ, together with the Father’s and his own Spirit, comes to dwell in each of us, though we are many, still the Spirit is one and undivided. He binds together the spirits of each and every one of us, ....and makes all appear as one in him. For just as the power of Christ’s sacred flesh unites those in whom it dwells into one body, I think that in the same way the one and undivided Spirit of God, who dwells in all, leads all into spiritual unity. (In Jo.ev., 11, 11: PG 74, 561) (CC738).*

And so we have in the Eucharist the embodiment of the Church’s mission: to announce, bear witness, make present, and spread the mystery of the Communion of the Holy Trinity. We are reminded of this in the Doxology as we hear at every Mass: ‘Through Him [i.e. Jesus, the Word], with Him, and in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory is yours, almighty Father, forever and ever. Amen.’

It was indeed a literary journey richly successful in finding links between the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist.

## References

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