



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 15 November 2006

St Paul and the Spirit

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today too, as in our last two Catecheses, we return to St Paul and his thought. We have before us a giant, not only in terms of his actual apostolate but also of his extraordinarily profound and stimulating theological teaching.

After meditating last time on what Paul wrote about the central place that Jesus Christ occupies in our life of faith, today let us look at what he said about the Holy Spirit and about his presence in us, because here too, the Apostle has something very important to teach us.

We know what St Luke told us of the Holy Spirit from his description of the event of Pentecost in the *Acts of the Apostles*. The Spirit of Pentecost brought with him a strong impulse to take on the commitment of the mission in order to witness to the Gospel on the highways of the world.

Indeed, the *Acts of the Apostles* relates a whole series of missions the Apostles carried out, first in Samaria, then on the coastal strip of Palestine, then towards Syria. Above all, the three great missionary journeys of Paul are recounted, as I recalled at one of our previous Wednesday meetings.

In his Letters, however, St Paul also spoke to us of the Spirit from another angle. He did not end by describing solely the dynamic and active dimension of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, but also analyzed his presence in the lives of Christians, which marks their identity.

In other words, in Paul's reflection on the Spirit he not only explained his influence on the *action* of Christians, but also on their *being*. Indeed, it is he who said that the Spirit of God dwells in us (cf. Rom 8: 9; I Cor 3: 16) and that "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Gal 4: 6).

In Paul's opinion, therefore, the Spirit stirs us to the very depths of our being. Here are some of his words on this subject which have an important meaning: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death... you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!", it is the Spirit himself" (Rom 8: 2, 15) who speaks in us because, as children, we can call God "Father".

Thus, we can see clearly that even before he does anything, the Christian already possesses a rich and fruitful interiority, given to him in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, an interiority which establishes him in an objective and original relationship of sonship with God. This is our greatest dignity: to be not merely images but also children of God. And it is an invitation to live our sonship, to be increasingly aware that we are adoptive sons in God's great family. It is an invitation to transform this objective gift into a subjective reality, decisive for our way of thinking, acting and being.

God considers us his children, having raised us to a similar if not equal dignity to that of Jesus himself, the one true Son in the full sense. Our filial condition and trusting freedom in our relationship with the Father is given or restored to us in him.

We thus discover that for Christians, the Spirit is no longer only the "Spirit of God", as he is usually described in the Old Testament and as people continue to repeat in Christian language (cf. Gn 41: 38; Ex 31: 3; I Cor 2: 11, 12; Phil 3: 3; etc.). Nor is he any longer simply a "Holy Spirit" generically understood, in the manner of the Old Testament (cf. Is 63: 10, 11; Ps 51[50]: 13), and of Judaism itself in its writings (Qumran, rabbinism).

Indeed, the confession of an original sharing in this Spirit by the Risen Lord, who himself became a "life-giving Spirit" (I Cor 15: 45), is part of the specificity of the Christian faith.

For this very reason, St Paul spoke directly of the "Spirit of Christ" (Rom 8: 9), of the "Spirit of his Son" (cf. Gal 4: 6) or of the "Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1: 19). It is as though he wanted to say that not only is God the Father visible in the Son (cf. Jn 14: 9), but that the Spirit of God also expresses himself in the life and action of the Crucified and Risen Lord!

Paul teaches us another important thing: he says that there is no true prayer without the presence of the Spirit within us. He wrote: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit

intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom 8: 26-27).

It is as if to say that the Holy Spirit, that is, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, is henceforth as it were the soul of our soul, the most secret part of our being, from which an impulse of prayer rises ceaselessly to God, whose words we cannot even begin to explain.

In fact, the Spirit, ever alert within us, completes what is lacking in us and offers to the Father our worship as well as our deepest aspirations.

This, of course, requires a degree of great and vital communion with the Spirit. It is an invitation to be increasingly sensitive, more attentive to this presence of the Spirit in us, to transform it into prayer, to feel this presence and thus to learn to pray, to speak to the Father as children in the Holy Spirit.

There is also another typical aspect of the Spirit which St Paul teaches us: his connection with love. Thus, the Apostle wrote: "Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5: 5).

In my Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, I cited a most eloquent sentence of St Augustine: "If you see charity, you see the Trinity" (n. 19), and I continued by explaining: "The Spirit, in fact, is that interior power which harmonizes [believers'] hearts with Christ's Heart and moves them to love their brethren as Christ loved them" (*ibid.*). The Spirit immerses us in the very rhythm of divine life, which is a life of love, enabling us to share personally in relations between the Father and the Son. It is not without significance that when Paul lists the various elements that constitute the fruit of the Spirit he puts love first: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace", etc. (Gal 5: 22).

And since by definition, love unites, this means first of all that the Spirit is the creator of communion within the Christian community, as we say at the beginning of Mass, borrowing Paul's words: "... may the fellowship of the Holy Spirit [that is, what he brings about] be with you all" (II Cor 13: 14).

Furthermore, however, it is also true that the Spirit stimulates us to weave charitable relations with all people. Therefore, when we love we make room for the Spirit and give him leeway to express himself fully within us.

We thus understand why Paul juxtaposes in the same passage of his *Letter to the Romans* the two exhortations: "Be aglow with the Spirit" and "Repay no one evil for evil" (Rom 12: 11, 17). Finally, according to St Paul, the Spirit is a generous downpayment given to us by God himself as a deposit and at the same time, a guarantee of our future inheritance (cf. II Cor 1: 22; 5: 5; Eph 1: 13-14).

We therefore learn from Paul that the Spirit's action directs our life towards the great values of love, joy, communion and hope. It is our task to experience this every day, complying with the inner promptings of the Spirit and helped in our discernment by the Apostle's enlightened guidance.

To special groups

I welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims here today, including members of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations and members of "Jesus Youth International" from India. May your visit to Rome be a time of joyful spiritual enrichment. Upon all of you, I invoke God's abundant Blessings!

Lastly, my greeting goes to *youth*, the *sick* and *newly-weds*. Today, we are celebrating the memory of Bishop St Albert the Great, who strove ceaselessly to establish peace among the peoples of his time. May his example be an incentive for you, dear *young people*, to be workers for justice and architects of reconciliation. May it be for you, dear *sick people*, an encouragement to trust in the Lord, who never abandons us in times of trial. May it be for you, dear *newly-weds*, an incentive to find in the Gospel the joy of welcoming and generously serving life, God's immeasurable gift.

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