



# The Holy See

---

JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 13 May 1998*

1. In preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the current year is particularly to the Holy Spirit. Continuing on the path marked out for the whole Church, and after concluding the Christological theme, today we begin a systematic reflection on the One who is “the Lord and Giver of life”. I have spoken extensively about the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity on various occasions. I recall in particular the Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* and the catechesis on the Creed. The imminent prospect of the Jubilee gives me the opportunity to reflect once again on the Holy Spirit, to examine with an adoring heart his action in the flow of time and history.

2. In fact, reflection is not easy, unless the Spirit himself comes to aid us in our weakness (cf. *Rom* 8:26). How, in fact, can we discern the presence of God’s Spirit in history? We can answer this question only by turning to the Holy Scriptures, which, being inspired by the Paraclete, gradually reveal his action and identity to us. They express to us, in a certain way, the Spirit’s “language”, “style” and “logic”. It is also possible to interpret the reality in which he works with eyes that penetrate beyond mere external observation to discern traces of his presence behind things and events. Scripture itself, beginning with the Old Testament, helps us understand that nothing of what is good, true and holy in the world can be explained without reference to the Spirit of God.

3. A first, veiled allusion to the Spirit is found in the very first lines of the Bible, in the hymn to God the Creator which opens the Book of Genesis: “The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” (*Gn* 1:2). Here the Hebrew word *ruach* is used for “spirit”, which means “breath” and can designate either the wind or the breath. As we know, this text belongs to the so called “priestly source” that dates back to the period of the Babylonian exile (6th century B.C.), when Israel’s faith had explicitly reached a monotheistic conception of God. As Israel became aware of the creative power of the one God through the light of Revelation, it came to realize that God created the universe by the power of his Word. The role of the Spirit appears in conjunction with the latter. This

perception is encouraged by the very analogy of language, which, by association, combines the word with the breath of the lips: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath (*ruach*) of his mouth" (*Ps* 33 [32]:6). God's vital and life-giving breath is not limited to the initial moment of creation, but keeps all creation in existence and gives it life by continuously renewing it: "When you send forth your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth" (*Ps* 104 [103]:30).

4. The most original feature of biblical revelation is to have recognized history as the privileged realm for the action of God's Spirit. In about 100 passages of the Old Testament, the *ruach* YHWH indicates the action of the Lord's Spirit guiding his people, especially at important turning points in their journey. Thus in the period of the judges, God sent his Spirit upon frail men and changed them into charismatic leaders invested with divine energy; this is what happened to Gideon, to Jephthah and in particular to Samson (cf. *Jgs* 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19). With the arrival of the Davidic monarchy this divine force, which until then had been manifested unpredictably and sporadically, acquired a certain stability. This can be clearly seen in the royal consecration of David, of which Scripture says: "The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 *Sm* 16:13). During and after the Babylonian exile, Israel's whole history is reread as a long dialogue between God and the people chosen "by his Spirit through the former prophets" (*Zec* 7:12). The prophet Ezekiel explains the link between the Spirit and prophecy when he says, for example: "And the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and he said to me, 'Say, Thus says the Lord...'" (*Ez* 11:5). But the prophetic vision looks above all to that privileged time in the future when the promises will be fulfilled under the sign of the divine *ruach*. Isaiah foretells the birth of a descendant on whom "the Spirit of the Lord shall rest ... the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord" (*Is* 11:2-3). "This text", as I wrote in the Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*, "is important for the whole pneumatology of the Old Testament, because it constitutes a kind of bridge between the ancient biblical concept of 'spirit', understood primarily as a 'charismatic breath of wind', and the '*Spirit*' as a person and as a gift, a gift for the person. The Messiah of the lineage of David ('from the stump of Jesse') is precisely that person on whom the Spirit 'shall rest'" (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, n. 15).

5. Two marks of the mysterious identity of the Holy Spirit can already be seen in the Old Testament and are then amply confirmed by the revelation of the New Testament. The first mark is the absolute *transcendence* of the Spirit, who is therefore called "holy" (*Is* 63:10, 11; *Ps* 51[50]:13). The Spirit of God is in every respect "divine". He is not a reality which man can acquire with his strength, but a gift which comes from on high: he can only be invoked and received. Infinitely "other" with regard to man, the Spirit is communicated with total gratuitousness to those who are called to co-operate with him in the history of salvation. And when this divine energy finds humble and ready acceptance, man is stripped of his selfishness and freed from his fears; truth and love, freedom and peace flourish in the world. Another mark of God's Spirit is the *dynamic* power he reveals when intervening in history. At times there is a risk of projecting onto the biblical image of the Spirit concepts tied to other cultures, for example, the concept of "spirit" as something

evanescent, static and inert. The biblical concept of ruach, however, indicates a supremely active, powerful and irresistible energy: the Spirit of the Lord, we read in Isaiah, “is like an overflowing stream” (*Is* 30:28). Therefore, when the Father intervenes with his Spirit, chaos is transformed into cosmos, the world comes alive and history is set in motion.

---

*To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, the Holy Father said:*

I warmly welcome to this audience the ecumenical groups from England and Wales and the Lutheran visitors from Denmark. I extend a special greeting to the priests and laity from the Diocese of Thamarasserry and to the Brothers of St Gabriel from India.

Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Wales, Denmark, India, the Philippines, Australia, Thailand, Canada and the United States of America, I invoke the abundant blessings of almighty God.

---