JAMES L. PAPANDREA

THE HOLY SPIRIT



The Lord, the Giver of Life

ASCENSION

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Let us examine the tradition, teaching, and faith of the Catholic Church from the beginning, which is nothing other than what the Lord gave, and the apostles preached, and the fathers preserved. On this the Church is founded, and whoever falls away from it can no longer be—nor be called—a Christian.

—St. Athanasius of Alexandria,
First Letter to Serapion 28.1

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About *The Holy Spirit: The Lord, the Giver of Life*

Every Sunday, Catholics stand together and profess, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life" in the Nicene Creed. These familiar words are a beautiful invitation to reflect more deeply on the third Person of the Trinity—but how often do we recite these words without pausing to consider their full meaning? Who is the Holy Spirit? What does it mean when we call him "Lord"? How does the Holy Spirit reveal the mystery of the Trinity? And how does the Holy Spirit continue to transform the Church and our lives today?

These questions are not for theologians alone; they matter to every Christian, and they offer us the opportunity to explore the mystery of the Trinity personally. Pondering this mystery can help us develop a closer relationship with the Holy Spirit himself.

In this mini-study, you will explore what God has revealed about the Holy Spirit through Sacred Scripture, the Nicene Creed, and the teachings of the Church, beginning with the Church Fathers. As you spend more time learning about who the Holy Spirit is and what he has done (and continues to do), you will discover how God, in all of his goodness, is working in your life today. Whether you are embarking on this study as an individual or in a group setting, you will have the chance to encounter the Holy Spirit more deeply, recognize his presence more clearly, and open your heart to the prayer of the Church: "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love."

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Materials: What do I need for this study?

- **Study Book:** This book contains the core content for all five sessions of this mini-study. Each session offers an overview of the topic and contains questions for individual reflection and group discussion.
- **Video Presentations:** These video presentations by Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio and Dr. James Papandrea provide comprehensive teaching and

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commentary on the Holy Spirit. They are available online or for purchase as a DVD set.

In addition to the workbook and video presentations, every participant and facilitator should have a copy of a Catholic Bible and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). We recommend ***The Great Adventure Catholic Bible***, which incorporates the color-coded *Bible Timeline*® Learning System along with informative side features and helpful contextual information throughout. We also recommend the **Ascension Edition of the *Catechism***, which uses the color-coded *Foundations of Faith* approach. Both are available for purchase at AscensionPress.com.

Additionally, complete digital versions of the Bible and *Catechism* are available for free on the Ascension app.

Structure: What makes this a "mini-study"? What are the main components of each session?

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We consider this a mini-study because of its focused attention on one topic—namely, the Holy Spirit—and its reduced amount of required outside reading. The content for each session is self-contained within this book; additional references and resources are included, but they are not required for small group discussion. Ultimately, each session is meant to help you focus more on prayerful discernment of the material and less on completing homework answers.

Each session includes the following components:

- **Reading:** Each session features material that can be read on your own time and questions that will help you think more deeply about what you have read. We encourage you to read the material ahead of your small group meeting, but it can be read at any time, before or after your group discussion.
- **Questions for Reflection and Discussion:** The book's questions feature individual reflection and group discussion questions, offering you the opportunity to apply the teachings and wisdom of each session to your personal life and to process larger insights in a group setting. We

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recommend reviewing the questions in advance of your meeting to help you prepare for discussion.

- **Small Group Meeting:** This is your opportunity to discuss the study questions and your own personal questions with your small group while having time for fellowship and other individual insights. During your group meeting, we recommend watching the video presentation first, before your group's discussion. **Video outlines** for each session are available for download at AscensionPress.com.

Format: What's the general sequence for small group meetings?

Each small group is different. Therefore, how you choose to conduct these small group gatherings—from the length of each meeting to how you approach the discussion and video presentation—depends on the needs of each group. For the best experience during your meeting, we recommend completing these steps in the following order:

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Watch

The videos provide a rich understanding of *The Holy Spirit: The Lord, the Giver of Life* with a special emphasis on ways to apply what you have learned to your daily life. Watching the video presentation as a group will provide insight and context for your discussion. Again, video outlines for each session are accessible online and available for download at AscensionPress.com.

Discuss

In this conversation, members of your group will have an opportunity to share insights, reflections, and further questions about the readings and discussion questions. The goal of the discussion is for the group to engage in fellowship and share ideas for applying these teachings on the Holy Spirit to everyday life. Trained facilitators should guide the small group discussion and keep it on track.

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Getting the Most Out of This Study

Although this is a mini-study, you want to be sure that the time and energy you put into it are worth the effort. Here are some ways to make sure your participation in this study will have a fruitful, long-lasting impact.

If You Have Time, Explore Additional Resources

Much of the content in each session includes plenty of references to Scripture, the *Catechism*, writings of the Church Fathers, and other resources. Consider returning to these resources for deeper exploration and further insight into the topic at hand.

Take Notes

As you read, make a note of the lines, images, and questions that come to mind. These are not only good things to bring up in small group discussions, but are also invaluable to bring into a conversation with God in prayer. Also take advantage of the personal reflection questions at the end of each session to help you reflect and apply these insights to your daily life.

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Focus on Good Discussion

The success of a small group depends on a good discussion. The people in your group will have unique insights; the questions you ask and connections you make together will deepen your understanding and appreciation of the Holy Spirit that individual study cannot. Some individuals in your group may be naturally eager to speak up, while others are more inclined to wait and listen. It is in everyone's interest to help make sure each person in the group has a fair chance to share their thoughts. Follow the "Ten Commandments for Small Group Discussion" (p. 106) and be mindful of how you are contributing to the conversation.

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SESSION ONE



The Holy Spirit by Corrado Giaquinto

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

"I believe in the Holy Spirit ..."

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As Catholics, we say the words "I believe in the Holy Spirit" so often that they become all too easy for us to pass over without a second thought. But this statement invites us to stop, think, and ask a fundamental question: What do we truly believe about the Holy Spirit?

At Mass, after we listen to the readings from Scripture and the teachings from the homily, the entire congregation rises to its feet and recites the Nicene Creed. We profess together what we believe as Christians. We first proclaim our belief in God the Father. Then we proclaim our belief in God the Son. Finally, we speak these words about the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit:

> I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
> who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
> who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
> who has spoken through the prophets.

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These lines are short and familiar, but they are filled with meaning. Have you stopped to consider what these lines from the Nicene Creed mean? As baptized Christians, it is important for us to reflect more deeply on these words. The Holy Spirit is not just an idea or a symbol. He is God himself, given to us as a gift, active in the Church and in our lives.

In these five sessions, we will follow the journey of the early Church as it grew in understanding the Holy Spirit. We will look to Scripture and the teachings of the Church to learn who the Holy Spirit is, clear up common misunderstandings, and discover how the Holy Spirit continues to draw us closer to God and into the life of the Trinity.

Symbols of the Holy Spirit

When considering the Holy Spirit, what comes to mind? Perhaps you imagine fire, water, or wind. Perhaps you instead picture a cloud, a dove, or even the oil of anointing. Where do these images come from? Most of them are derived from Scripture, which we will explore in a moment. In general, the Church explains

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that each of these images associated with the Holy Spirit symbolizes the real, transformative power of the Spirit in the history of salvation and in the life of the Church (see CCC 694–701).

Still, while these images are prevalent throughout Catholic iconography, they are only representations of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is pure spirit, not a tangible object or physical being we can grasp with our senses. These symbols only serve to describe the actions of the Holy Spirit; they don't describe the Spirit himself.

As we begin to think more deeply about the Holy Spirit, we might find ourselves wondering: What is the Holy Spirit? But that question points us in the wrong direction. The Holy Spirit is not a *what*; he is a *who*. The Holy Spirit is a Person. But when we say the Holy Spirit is a Person, we do not mean a human person. We mean that the Holy Spirit is *someone*—God himself, the third Person of the Trinity. He knows, loves, speaks, and acts.

So, what has God revealed to us about the Holy Spirit? How do we know who he is and how he works in our lives today? Let's tackle these questions by first considering what God himself has revealed to us about the Holy Spirit in Sacred Scripture.

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What Does the Old Testament Tell Us About the Holy Spirit?

It turns out that the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the very first verses of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:1–2).

The word translated as "Spirit" here is the Hebrew term *ruah*, which has a range of meanings, including "spirit," "breath," "air," and "wind" (see CCC 691). In the Bible's account of Creation, we see that all three Persons of the Trinity are present. The Father is there, referred to as "God" (*Elohim* in Hebrew). The Son is there, as the Word of God, when God speaks creation into existence.* And

* Compare this to the opening verses of John's Gospel (John 1:1–2).

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Chaos. The Genesis by Ivan Aivazovsky

the Holy Spirit is there as the one who "hovered over" or "overshadowed" the primordial waters. The Holy Spirit will continue to overshadow persons and events throughout the rest of Scripture.* So, in this very first scene of Scripture, we are introduced to the entire Trinity.

What Scripture reveals about the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament is real, but it is incomplete. The patriarchs and prophets were given glimpses of the Spirit, but the full truth about who the Holy Spirit is would not be made clear until later. That fuller understanding came through Jesus—especially after his Ascension, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Church at Pentecost. Only then did the disciples begin to see more clearly who the Holy Spirit is and how he lives and works among God's people.

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Even so, the Old Testament still teaches us important truths about the Holy Spirit. So let us look more closely at what those earlier writings reveal.

Breath of Life

First of all, the Old Testament teaches us that the Holy Spirit is the breath of life which animates all creation, especially those creatures made in God's image: humans. As a poetic example, consider these parallel lines from the book of Psalms: "When you hide your face, they are dismayed; / when you take away their spirit [breath], they die / and return to their dust. / When you send forth your Spirit, they are created; / and you renew the face of the earth" (Psalm 104:29–30).

* Further on in the Bible, the Holy Spirit would also "overshadow" the Tabernacle (see Wisdom 19:7); the Ark of the Covenant (see Exodus 25:20; 37:9; Hebrews 9:5); the Blessed Mother, who is the Ark of the New Covenant (see Luke 1:35); and Jesus during his Transfiguration (see Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34).

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We can see from this psalm that the creation of life is associated with the Spirit, and death is the result of the removal of breath. When God wanted to make a point by bringing a valley of dry bones back to life, we read that it was the Holy Spirit who breathed life back into the dead (see Ezekiel 37:5–10). This isn't to say that the Holy Spirit is literally the air that we humans breathe—but the Holy Spirit could be called the "breath of life" in the sense that the gift of life is associated with the Holy Spirit in Scripture.

Anointing and Inspiration

Another important way the Old Testament speaks about the Holy Spirit is through the ideas of anointing and inspiring. The word *inspiration* comes from the Latin prefix *in-* and the verb *spirare*, meaning "to breathe into." When God inspires someone, he breathes his own life and light into that person. The Spirit fills him with wisdom, courage, and understanding.

In the Old Testament, this inner gift of the Spirit is often connected with anointing. To anoint someone meant to pour oil over them as a sign that they had been chosen by God for a special mission. But the oil was only the outward sign. The deeper reality was that God was pouring out his Spirit upon them.

When Samuel anointed David, Scripture tells us that "the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13). The same thing happened to Saul: After he was anointed, "the spirit of God came mightily upon him" and he began to prophesy (1 Samuel 10:10). God chose them, anointed them, and inspired them for leadership.*

At the same time, the Old Testament shows that this gift could be lost through disobedience. After Saul turned away from God, "the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul" (1 Samuel 16:14). David, after his own grave sins, prayed,

* We can see this phenomenon of inspiration in the Holy Spirit throughout the Old Testament. See, for example, Numbers 11:16–30; Nehemiah 9:30; Psalm 143:10; Wisdom 7:7; 9:17; Isaiah 11:2; 44:3; 61:1; Hosea 9:7; Micah 3:8; and Zechariah 7:12; 12:10. All of these passages associate the Holy Spirit with inspiration. In the New Testament, Jesus himself quoted the prophet Isaiah to indicate to those gathered in the synagogue that he himself was inspired by the Holy Spirit (though in a unique way; see Luke 4:16–21).

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"Take not your holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11). God's people could even grieve his Spirit by rebelling against him (see Isaiah 63:10).

Together, these passages teach us something important: The Holy Spirit is not just a symbol. He is God's living presence—given to guide, strengthen, and lead his people.

Mighty Wind

Finally, there are also hints in the Old Testament that when God's power is enacted in the world, the Holy Spirit is making God's will happen. For example, when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea is attributed to wind (see Exodus 14:21); the same event is attributed to God's breath later in the Song of Moses (see Exodus 15:8). Much like what we see in Acts 2:2 in the New Testament, where the Spirit fills the room where the apostles are hiding, Wisdom 1:7 tells us that "the Spirit of the Lord has filled the world"—which implies that the Holy Spirit also has the divine attribute of omnipresence, and therefore, in a way, the Holy Spirit *is* the presence and power of God in the world.

But here is where we find our first possible stumbling block. What we know so far is that there *is* a Holy Spirit, who is from God, and who could be called the "breath of life," the "anointing of inspiration," or the "mighty wind." But as we find these attributes of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, we need to be careful. The Holy Spirit is not simply another name for God; neither is he a literary personification of God's power. If we assume, for the sake of clarification, that the Hebrew name *Yahweh* refers to God the Father, the first Person of the Holy Trinity, then we know that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit *of* Yahweh (usually rendered as "Spirit of the LORD" in the Old Testament). Still, the Holy Spirit is not *identical* with Yahweh, for Yahweh can give the Spirit and take away the Spirit without it being said that Yahweh has moved from one place to another. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit *of* the Father, but the Holy Spirit is not the Father.

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What Does the New Testament Tell Us About the Holy Spirit?

Now that we have explored the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, let's see what Jesus and his apostles have to tell us about the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

"In the Form of a Dove"

We see that all three Persons of the Trinity are present and accounted for in the opening verses of Genesis. Very early in the Gospels, we have another scene in which all three Persons of the Trinity are revealed. During the baptism of Jesus, the voice of the Father comes from heaven and affirms Jesus is his true Son anointed for his messianic mission, while the Holy Spirit descends upon him in the form of a dove (see Matthew 3:13–17; Luke 3:21–22).

Why a dove? It's fair to say that witnesses who were present at the Jordan River that day would recall the story of Noah and the Flood. When they saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, no doubt the first thing they thought of was the dove returning to the ark with an olive branch, showing Noah and his family that the storm was over and that they had found the safety of land (see Genesis 8:10–11; CCC 701).

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From the beginning, the Church Fathers interpreted the flood waters through which Noah and his family were saved as a "type," or foreshadowing, of Christian Baptism (see 1 Peter 3:20–21). Jesus himself would refer to Baptism as a birth from above in water and the Spirit, and he would refer to a baptized person as one who was "born of the Spirit" (John 3:1–8). The dove symbolized all of these things: the Holy Spirit, the grace of Baptism, and the peace of eternal life. Those who were at Jesus' baptism saw the Holy Spirit presented to them in a way that would have brought all of this to their minds. With the coming of the Messiah, God was bringing an olive branch to humanity, announcing that the hope of the safe harbor of eternity was now near.

However, as the Church Fathers would have to clarify, this scene of Jesus' baptism is not the moment when Jesus "received" the Holy Spirit. In fact, Jesus never *received* the Holy Spirit at all. Jesus was always in the power of the Spirit,

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always inspired by the Spirit, always one with the Spirit, eternally in his divine nature, and from his conception in his human nature. Everything Jesus did in his earthly life and ministry he did by the power of the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 12:28; CCC 695). No, Jesus did not *receive* the Holy Spirit at his baptism; the descent of the Spirit was a sign for the people that Jesus was anointed with the Spirit. As the apostles would later clarify, Jesus is not in fact a recipient of the Spirit at all, but is the source and giver of the Spirit, along with the Father.

Living Water

Following this manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism, we encounter Jesus' own teachings about the Spirit. What did he teach? Consistent with the Old Testament, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, whom God gives to people for inspiration, guidance, and empowerment.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as "living water": "On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, 'If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water."'" In his commentary immediately following Jesus' words, John explains that when Jesus talks about the "living water," he is talking about the Holy Spirit: "Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37–39; see also CCC 694, 2652; Revelation 21:6; 22:17).

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Elsewhere in John's Gospel, Jesus again uses the image of "living water" for the Holy Spirit when speaking with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well:

> If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. … Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (John 4:10–14)

In this encounter, notice how Jesus' description of the Holy Spirit (the "living water") is not just for the person alone. The Holy Spirit is meant to well up and bubble over to others—where the believer actually becomes an instrument of

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God's work in bringing life to others. With the fulfillment of the promise of the New Covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31–34), Jesus expresses the new reality in which the Holy Spirit would be available to *all* believers, not only a select few, as in the Old Testament. To explain it another way, Jesus teaches that it would no longer only be the *leaders* of God's people who would be anointed with the Spirit, but that the Spirit is now available to *all* of God's people. As St. Paul would later write, as a gift of baptismal grace, the Holy Spirit indwells believers (see Romans 8:11; 1 Corinthians 3:16), a concept we will return to in a later session.

The Anointing of Christ and Christians

Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One. The word *Christ* means "anointed." He was anointed by the Holy Spirit in a unique and perfect way.

But to be a Christian does not simply mean that we admire Jesus or try to copy his example. It means that we share in his anointing. The name Christian means that we belong to Christ and take part in his life. Through Baptism, we are anointed with the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself promised this gift. He said: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13). According to Jesus, the Father freely gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask and receive him. This gift is given to us in Baptism, when we become children of God (see John 1:12–13). From that moment on, the Holy Spirit lives within us.

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Jesus also promised that the Spirit would act through his followers. When they faced persecution, they were not to be afraid, because the Holy Spirit would speak through them (see Matthew 10:19–20; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11–12). In the early Church, this promise proved true. Those who suffered for the Faith often spoke with courage and wisdom beyond their own strength. They were recognized as prophetic witnesses—men and women strengthened by the Spirit to guide and encourage others even in times of danger.

To be a Christian, then, is not only to follow Christ. It is to be anointed by his Spirit, to share in his mission, and to allow the Holy Spirit to act through us.

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The Paraclete

We know that Jesus Christ is our Savior. He is the Son of the Father, and the mediator between us and the Father, reconciling us to him (see 2 Corinthians 5:19; 1 Timothy 2:5). But Jesus is also called our Counselor (see Isaiah 9:6), the one who advocates on our behalf with the Father—not only to reconcile us to the Father for salvation, but in every aspect of life, drawing us closer to the Father, and further along in the process of sanctification.

In the first epistle of John, the apostle wrote, "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). The Greek word translated here as "advocate" is *parakletos*, or "paraclete." It has a variety of meanings that include not only "counselor" and "advocate," but also "comforter," "intercessor," and someone who is "called to one's side" to come to the aid of a person. This is who Jesus is for us.

Knowing that, it is quite significant that Jesus would use this same term to speak of the Holy Spirit (see CCC 692). In John's Gospel, Jesus says to his apostles, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor [*parakletos*], to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16). According to Jesus himself, the Holy Spirit is an "advocate," like himself. In fact, Jesus implied that after his Ascension, the Holy Spirit would be the divine presence among the apostles in the same way that he himself was during his life: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). Jesus went on to say that the Holy Spirit would inspire the apostles to remember everything Jesus had taught them so that they could pass it on to their disciples and eventually write the New Testament itself (see John 14:26; 15:26).

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Three in One, One in Three

Among his other teachings on the Holy Spirit, Jesus naturally taught his disciples about the Holy Trinity, along with his relationship to the other two Persons of the Trinity. In teaching them the name in which they were to baptize others, Jesus directed them to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). There is no doubt that when he said "the Son," he meant

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himself, and he meant to include himself in the Godhead. What some people may miss is that he did not say, "in the *names* of" (plural), but "in the *name* of" (singular). There is only one name in which we are baptized because there is only one God. And yet that singular name is called by the three titles of *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit*.

This tells us many things. It is clear that all three Persons of the Trinity *are God*. After all, when Jesus placed himself within the Trinity, he placed himself between the Father and the Holy Spirit. But Jesus is not simply repeating himself, as if these three titles all mean or refer to exactly the same subject. There is a oneness to the three Persons, a oneness that results in a singular divinity: one God, and only one God. But there is also a distinction to be made between the three Persons. The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father. And although both the Father and the Son are spirit (see John 4:23–24), and though both the Father and the Son are holy, nevertheless the title *Holy Spirit* uniquely applies to the third Person of the Trinity, who is neither the Father nor the Son (see CCC 691).

The "Unforgivable Sin"

When talking about Jesus' teachings on the Holy Spirit, one thing we cannot neglect to discuss is the one sin Jesus says cannot be forgiven: namely, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 12:31–32; Luke 12:10). What did Jesus mean when he talked about this, and why could it not be forgiven? Jesus went so far as to say that a person could blaspheme against *him* and hope to be forgiven, but not against the Holy Spirit. What's that about?

As Christ was driving out demons, the Pharisees made the audacious claim that he, Jesus, was doing this not by the power of the Holy Spirit but by the power of the Devil (see Matthew 12:24)! With this context in mind, we can see that to "blaspheme against the Holy Spirit" means to attribute the saving work of Christ and the Spirit to the Devil—or to say that the Holy Spirit was not at work in something in which the Spirit *was* at work.*

* As a contemporary example, some Christians today deny the work of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Baptism when it is given to infants and other persons who lack the use of reason. Additionally, when certain Protestant groups rebaptize someone who was validly baptized in the Catholic Church, they blaspheme the Holy Spirit by saying that the Holy Spirit did not bring grace and forgiveness to the person receiving Baptism.

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The definition of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit can now be understood more broadly to mean any rejection of Jesus' offer of grace, forgiveness, salvation, and freedom from demonic forces, all of which come to a person in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the reason that the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven is that it is a rejection of forgiveness and, more specifically, a rejection of the Holy Spirit who would come in the grace of the Sacrament of Baptism. Since God is love, God would never coerce us, even for our own salvation, and so the acceptance of God's offer of forgiveness must be voluntary in order for us to receive that gift. Therefore, to refuse to repent is to reject the Holy Spirit, which is to reject the grace and forgiveness that the Holy Spirit would bring, which results in God honoring a person's free will, and that person does not receive salvation (see CCC 1864).

It must be said that, as long as that person lives, there is still time to repent and thereby stop blaspheming the Holy Spirit. In that sense, it's like any other mortal sin: If it becomes habitual, it will separate you from God, and you will die in your sin—and this is what Scripture calls a "hardness of heart," an obstinate rejection of the will of God in your life. But as long as you live, there is still time to turn it around.

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What the Holy Spirit Is *Not*

These teachings we find in the Old and New Testaments have helped us achieve an initial understanding of who the Holy Spirit is. However, one important means of helping us improve our understanding is to recognize what the Holy Spirit *isn't*.

The apologists of the second century and the theologians of the third century all talked about the Holy Spirit, and they all contributed something to the Church's understanding of the Spirit. But in the early centuries of the Church's history, often the Church Fathers preferred to speak of the Holy Spirit (and God in general) in what is often referred to as "negative" terms, or as the "way of negation" (*via negativa* in Latin, or *apophatic* theology in Greek). What this means is that, especially in the life of the early Church, often it was considered safer to say less about what the Holy Spirit *is* and more about what the Holy Spirit *is not*. Negation can help us infer an increasing understanding of the Holy Spirit.

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Not a Ghost

We should begin this point by explaining that the Holy Spirit is not a ghost—at least not in the popular sense of the word. This may seem obvious to us, yet many of us are aware of older English translations of the Bible and the liturgy, in which the Holy Spirit is called the "Holy Ghost." There are even some Catholic parishes dedicated to the Holy Ghost. This is because English, in part, has Germanic roots; the German term for the Holy Spirit is *Heilige Geist*. But in modern English, a ghost usually refers to the soul, or spirit, of a deceased human, or an evil spirit (such as a *poltergeist*, which comes from the German for "a noisy spirit").

If the writers of the New Testament had wanted us to see the Holy Spirit as some sort of ghost, they would have had a perfectly good word for that: the Greek word *phantasma*, or "phantom." In fact, this is the word used in the Gospels when Jesus walks on water, and the apostles mistakenly think he is a ghost (see Matthew 14:26). Of course, Jesus was not a ghost—and neither is the Holy Spirit. The Greek word that is used for the Spirit is not *phantasma*, but *pneuma*, which is the root of the English word *pneumatic*—meaning "powered by air." This is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *ruah*, with basically the same range of meanings, including "wind" and "breath." Therefore, we should say that it is an error to think of the Holy Spirit as though he were a ghost.

Not for Duplication

Not a Thing

The Holy Spirit is also not an *it* or a *thing* that God *has*, if that means that the Spirit is separate and detachable from God himself. If the Holy Spirit were a possession of God, that would make the Holy Spirit a creation of God—a created thing or being that would therefore not be eternal. While the Holy Spirit *is* the "Spirit of God" (and when God gives the Holy Spirit, God is giving of himself), the Holy Spirit is not identical with the Father. Therefore the Holy Spirit is somehow distinct from the Father (though this becomes more clear in the New Testament than it was in the Old Testament), and so *Holy Spirit* is not simply another name for the One whom Jesus calls Father.

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Not the Father, Not the Son

This statement may seem obvious at this point, but it is important to emphasize. The Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son; he is distinct from both. The best way to understand the distinction between the three Persons of the Trinity is by the concept of *agency*. When you think of the word *agent,* you might, for example, picture an ambassador who is the agent of a home country or law enforcement agents who enforce the government's will. Someone is the *agent* of another when one enacts the other's will in the wider world, as a representative of the other.

When it comes to God, Sacred Scripture often presents this concept as a sender and a messenger. The messenger is the agent of the sender, doing the sender's will and work in the world, representing the sender to the people, and representing the people to the sender. Jesus Christ is the messenger of the Father, who is the sender (see John 5:19). Jesus himself taught this in the parable of the wicked tenants, in which Jesus tells the story of a landowner who sends his son to check on those who are maintaining his property in his absence (see Matthew 21:33–41; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–18). The Holy Spirit, then, is the messenger of the Father and the Son, who are the senders of the Spirit (see John 14:26; 15:26).

Not for Duplication

Scripture and Tradition also make a distinction between the Persons of the Trinity with certain terms of speech—the little words people often pass over without a thought. The Creation of the universe, among many other important works of God, is often said to have been accomplished "*by* the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit." While it is perfectly correct to say that all three Persons of the Trinity are Creator, technically speaking, the Son and the Spirit are *agents* of Creation ("all things were made *through* him," as it says in John 1:3; emphasis added). This means that the Father is the primary, or ultimate, cause of Creation (the First Cause, according to the early Christian philosophers), and the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct from the Father in that they are secondary, or instrumental, causes. The universe was created *by* the Father, *through* the agency of the Son, *in* the overshadowing empowerment of the Holy Spirit. As St. Athanasius wrote, just as there is only one God, "There is one activity in the Trinity … for there is nothing which is not brought into being and actualized through the Word in the Spirit."[1]

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We will return to these concepts of agency, along with sender and messenger, as we continue through the study. For now, it's enough to note, as the Church Fathers did, that the sender and the messenger are distinct because they are not identical.

The Holy Spirit Is One with the Father and the Son

One of the biggest mistakes people make when talking about the Trinity—and especially when talking about the Holy Spirit—is to assign different tasks to the three Persons. In fact, even when we speak of the Persons in terms of sender and messenger, we need to clarify that these are not "roles" that the Persons of the Trinity play. These are relational terms that describe each Person's relationship to the other two.

It's important to note that even though the Holy Spirit is *distinct* from the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is not *separate* from the Father and the Son. Though we may make subtle distinctions between the three Persons to clarify that the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son, nevertheless, the three Persons are not separate. That's why we never use the word *people* to describe the three Persons of the Trinity, since the word *people* would imply too much separation between them.

Not for Duplication

In the eleventh century, St. Anselm of Canterbury wrote,

> The title "Holy Spirit" is a relational term, so that we understand the Holy Spirit as the spirit of someone. For although the Father is spirit and holy, and the Son is spirit and holy, the Father is not the spirit of anyone, nor is the Son the spirit of anyone, in the way in which the Holy Spirit is the spirit of someone, since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God [i.e., the Trinity] and the Spirit of the Father and the Son.[2]

St. Anselm is saying that, just like the titles *Father* and *Son*, the title *Holy Spirit* is a relational term, and it describes more about the Spirit's relationship to the other two Persons of the Trinity (see Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6) than it does about the Holy Spirit's relationship to humanity, including what we might perceive the Holy Spirit "does."

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Now it is true that even Scripture sometimes speaks of what the Holy Spirit "does." The act of writing Scripture itself is ascribed to the inspiration of the Spirit. We will dig into this concept in a later session, but for the moment it's enough to reiterate that even when Scripture seems to assign different tasks to the three Persons of the Trinity, this is really a figure of speech; it is actually the case that all three Persons of the Trinity do everything that God does. So that means that all three Persons of the Trinity inspired the writing of Scripture. The divine inspiration of Sacred Scripture was accomplished *by* the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Spirit. To be precise, when we hear that the Holy Spirit has "done" something, we should know that this really means that the Blessed Trinity has done something through the *agency* of the Holy Spirit.

Although we may sometimes use these relational terms in the context of divine activity, the point is that all three Persons are unified in all divine activity. The three Persons of the Trinity are never doing separate things. They never "split up" to do different tasks, and so we should never assign different tasks to the Persons as a way to distinguish between them.

We call this doctrine inseparable operation. Inseparable operation is just what the title implies: All three Persons of the Trinity are at work in all divine activity. As the *Catechism* affirms,

> Inseparable in what they are, the divine persons are also inseparable in what they do. But within the single divine operation each shows forth what is proper to him in the Trinity, especially in the divine missions of the Son's Incarnation and the gift of the Holy Spirit. (CCC 267; see also 689)

The *Catechism* also says, "Christ's whole work is in fact a joint mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit" (CCC 727).

INSEPARABLE OPERATION: A doctrine that states how all three Persons of the Trinity are always at work in divine activity. God is one and is always acting as one God.

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From all these teachings on the Holy Spirit rooted in Sacred Scripture, we can better see how the three Persons of the Trinity are *distinct* (the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son), but not *separate* (there is only one God, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God).

Perhaps a good analogy for how the Holy Spirit works as one with the Father and the Son is to think about God as a song. For the music of the song to become a reality, it requires a singer, the singer's voice, and the air that will vibrate and make the notes heard. Think of the Father as the singer, the Son as the voice, and the Spirit as the air which the voice causes to vibrate and which brings the melody of the singer to the ears of listeners. Without the air, the song could not be heard by anyone. The Holy Spirit is the wind on which the melody of the Father comes from the Son to the Church. The Holy Spirit is the One whom the Father and the Son give to humanity to inspire us, guide us, and reveal divinity to us.

In Summary

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The title *Holy Spirit* is not simply another name for God, or a metaphor for divinity, or a literary personification of God's activity. The three Persons of the Trinity are distinct but not separate, which means that the Holy Spirit is distinct from, but not separate from, the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son, but the Holy Spirit is not the Father, and he is not the Son. The Spirit is distinct from the Father and Son in that the Spirit is the messenger, or agent, of the Father and the Son. But the Spirit is not separate from the Father and the Son because the Spirit always works with the Father and the Son and is active in all divine work from Creation on, and he is present in every manifestation of divine power. The doctrine that all three Persons are at work in all divine activity is the doctrine of inseparable operation.

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For Personal Reflection

» List all the divine names, titles, or terms you can think of. Which ones apply to all three Persons of the Trinity, and which ones apply to one Person of the Trinity only?

Remember that names which describe *activities* of God, even including terms like *Creator* and *Savior,* actually apply to all three Persons of the Trinity. Those terms which apply to all three Persons of the Trinity are called divine attributes. They describe what divinity is. Divine attributes are things like being eternal, omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (everywhere at all times without limit). Those terms which apply to only one Person of the Trinity are called personal properties.

Thinking ahead to the next session in our journey, what do you think will be the Church's answer to the question of whether the Holy Spirit is God? Can you think of any *personal* properties that apply only to the Holy Spirit and not to the Father or the Son? There are a few, but not very many, and these will describe how it is that the Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son.

Not for Duplication

» Have you ever read John 14:12 and thought, *How is that possible? How could it be that mere humans can do "greater works" than the works that Jesus did?* Look at Philippians 2:5–8. What does it mean that Jesus "emptied himself"? *Hint*: It does not mean that he gave up his divinity or in any way became less divine in his Incarnation. It means that what Jesus did, he did not do by his own power (which he had chosen to set aside to experience real humanity) but by the power of the Holy Spirit—the same Holy Spirit that he has given to you in your baptism. What kind of responsibility comes with that great power?

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For Group Discussion

» What about the Holy Spirit do you hope to understand better as you go through this study?

» Think about the continuity between the Old and New Testaments with regard to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has always been there, even when the people of God didn't quite understand who the Holy Spirit was. Read the passages in which the Holy Spirit "overshadows" a place or a person with the power of the presence of God. The Holy Spirit overshadowed the Creation of the universe (Genesis 1:1–2), the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant (in the cloud, Exodus 40:34–35), the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant (Luke 1:35), Jesus at the Transfiguration (again, described as a cloud, Matthew 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36). Discuss the similarities in these holy moments.

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Video Discussion Questions

» In the video, Marcellino D'Ambrosio describes his past experience of the Holy Spirit feeling more like a distant stranger. What has your experience of the Holy Spirit been like in your life? How has your understanding or experience of the Holy Spirit changed throughout your life?

» Which examples or images of the Holy Spirit from the Old Testament are most striking to you? Which examples of the Holy Spirit acting in the New Testament stand out to you? In what ways do you think these examples help reveal the Holy Spirit as a gift to the Church?

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For Further Study

WATCH OUT FOR THIS:

Depersonalizing the Holy Spirit into a Thing or Metaphor

The title *Holy Spirit* is the relational name for the third Person of the Trinity. It is not a metaphor or a literary device; it is not just another name for God in general, or some kind of metaphor for God's activity in the world. The Holy Spirit is not simply a poetic way of talking about God or God's power.

We can already see in the Old Testament (and it becomes clearer in the New Testament) that the Holy Spirit is not identical with the One whom the Hebrews called *Elohim* or *Yahweh*. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit *of God*, and yet the Holy Spirit is somehow distinct from the Father as one whom the Father may give to people for inspiration and guidance. Still, the Holy Spirit is not a "thing" that God "has" and "gives away." The gift of the Holy Spirit is God giving himself, and he does not diminish himself by giving the gift. The Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father (and the Son), but he is not separate.

Biblical references to the Holy Spirit as a creative and inspiring force are not simply literary personifications of created things, such as when inanimate objects shout or "cry out" (see Genesis 4:10; Psalm 65:13), when awareness is attributed to forces of nature (see Psalm 104:19), or when wisdom is personified. In particular, it is never implied that the Holy Spirit is a part of creation.

Reducing the Holy Spirit to a metaphor or personification is especially problematic because it tends to depersonalize the Spirit. In other words, the temptation would be to turn the Holy Spirit into a *what* rather than a *who*. This leads to referring to the Holy Spirit as *it*, and that causes confusion.

Now it is true that there are some Bible translations that use the pronoun *it* to refer to the Holy Spirit. This is the result of well-meaning translators who are trying to stick close to the original language, usually Greek in the New Testament. Because the Greek word for Spirit, *Pneuma*, is grammatically neuter, some translations will refer to the Holy Spirit as *it*. But this is a mistake. The grammatical "gender" of words in languages like Greek have little or nothing to

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do with biological sex, and even if the intention is to indicate that, as pure spirit, the Holy Spirit is neither male nor female (which is true), the result is to refer to the Holy Spirit as a *thing*, which lacks the reverence that ought to be shown to the Spirit of God.

As it will become clear later, the Holy Spirit is a *Person*, meaning that the Spirit is *personal*—which means that the Holy Spirit is One who is in *relationship* with others, especially with the other two Persons of the Trinity. And so, the Holy Spirit cannot be an *it* or a *what*; however we describe the Holy Spirit, the Spirit must be a *who*.

WATCH OUT FOR THIS:

Assigning Different Job Descriptions to the Persons of the Trinity

This is actually a heresy sometimes called "functionalism," which is a kind of modalism. Modalism was a heresy that emerged in the early Church when some teachers decided that the only way to "protect" the oneness of God was to say that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were not actually three divine Persons but were just three different names for *one* divine Person. The Church Fathers taught that God is one divinity in three Persons, whereas the modalists held that God is one person with three names. These early modalists (often referred to as Sabellians, after the prominent modalist teacher Sabellius) basically removed all distinction between the three Persons of the Trinity and said that the Son was nothing other than the Father in disguise. Like Clark Kent is to Superman or Peter Parker is to Spider-Man, the one is just the "secret identity" of the other. This effectively reduced the Holy Spirit, in their teaching, to just another way of talking about an invisible God.

MODALISM: A heresy that claims that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not actually three divine Persons but are just three different names for one divine person

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There are many problems with the modalist heresy, not least of which is that by conflating the Persons of the Trinity into one, what is lost is the real humanity of Jesus Christ. If he is just the Father in disguise, his humanity is reduced to the disguise, and his Passion becomes a pantomime. Or, from another angle, conflating the three Persons into one puts the Father on the Cross—and when confronted with this logical impossibility, the modalists actually responded that they thought the Passion was an illusion. And with regard to the Holy Spirit, if the distinct Personhood of the Spirit is denied, the Spirit is reduced to an impersonal force or the personification of the activity of God. And this is why it is a grave error to recast the biblical Trinitarian formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see Matthew 28:19) into something that proposes to define the Persons of the Trinity by activity, such as "Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer."

As it turns out, there are correct ways to talk about the distinctions between the Father, Son, and Spirit (and we will get to these in due time)—but function or activity is not one of them. Keep in mind the doctrine of inseparable operation: All three Persons of the Trinity are involved in all divine activity, so all three Persons are rightfully called Creator, and all three Persons are called Savior, and all three Persons are Sustainer and Sanctifier. As the Church Fathers will eventually clarify, the three Persons of the Trinity have only the one divine will, and they always act together.

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