

I believe in the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is for many people the “mystery man” of the Godhead (a term used to refer to the whole of God). Jesus we can imagine. We can just about get our head around “the Father”, but who is this Holy Spirit, and why is he needed? He seems as difficult to lay hands on as Harry Lime, of “Third Man” fame. Actually, he is the element of the Godhead who continues Jesus’ work here on earth. The Father wills, plans, and supervises. Jesus the Son came to mediate, and to offer His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, and now acts as our “friend at court” in glory with the Father. The Holy Spirit carries on the work of the Father and the Son on earth, and in people’s hearts. He is the “hands and feet” of the Godhead. We Christians may say “God spoke to me, or did this or that in my life”, we may say, “I can feel Jesus to be real in my heart.” But it is the Holy Spirit who is doing the work. He carries on the work of the Father and the Son on their behalf, and is quite happy that they get the credit. Jesus says of him: “He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.”(John 16: 13-14) He has three main functions:

1. Enlivening

Jesus opened up the way to God for us, but it is the Holy Spirit who is working unseen in the world in the hearts of all people (whether or not they respond), drawing them closer to Christ, opening their eyes to their own need and their hearts to accept the forgiveness and eternal life Jesus offers. Jesus says the Spirit will testify to Him (“when the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.” John 15: 26). He will also convince the world it was wrong to reject Jesus, and that Jesus was right in what He said and did (“When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.” John 16: 8-11). The Spirit brings us into a life-giving relationship with God, and assures us in our hearts that we belong to God. In fact, St. Paul goes as far as to say the Spirit brings us into such a close relationship with God, we can address him as “Abba”, an intimate form of address for a father, almost akin to “daddy” (“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” Romans 8: 15-16). The Spirit gives us life (Romans 8: 11) by leading us to Jesus to receive from Him the life He won for us through His death and resurrection.

2. Enlightening

As the believer seeks to live for Christ day by day, there are many questions to be asked. What must I believe about God? How does He want me to live? How does His teaching apply to everyday life? We need guidance, teaching, illumination and guidance on so many things. This it is the Holy Spirit’s job to provide. We heard earlier that Jesus said: “when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell

you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.” The Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. In John’s Gospel, Jesus is *the* Truth (John 14: 6 “I am the way, *the truth*, and the life”). Here we are being told that the Spirit is carrying on Jesus work of revealing God’s truth by reminding his followers of His teaching and helping them to interpret it. The Spirit re-presents Jesus and explains Him to each new generation. Jesus says: “But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” John 14: 26). The “another Counsellor” phrase suggests Jesus was the first one. He is carrying on the work Jesus came to do. “Counsellor” in those days meant someone who gave advice (especially to rulers), and so the thought is of one who teaches and enlightens, as opposed to one who deals in therapy. He takes Jesus, the Truth, and explains him to all.

3. Enabling

Perhaps, next to guidance, what the Christian most needs in order to follow Christ in today’s world, is power – strength and gifts. And this, too, the Holy Spirit provides. St. Paul lists a number of “spiritual gifts” (the Greek term is *charismata* – gifts of grace) in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 (two lists, vv.3-11, 28-30), and Ephesians 4: 11. None of the lists is precisely the same (only one gift is common to all – prophecy), and the impression is that the lists are just examples of which many more could be adduced. No-one is expected to possess all the gifts, but God does give these gifts, and others, to His people, to enable them to do His work. The Spirit is seen at work in miracles, including the miracles of Jesus. Luke especially emphasises that Jesus is empowered by and led by the Spirit as He embarks on his ministry (Luke 4: 1). Peter, in his speech to the household of Cornelius spoke of how “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with *the Holy Spirit and power*”. The phrase in italics represents a Hebrew idiom which is more accurately translated “the powerful Holy Spirit”. Power was evident on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came like a rushing mighty wind and tongues of fire. And when the infant church tasted persecution for the first time, the believers were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly (Acts 2: 1-14, 4: 31). St. Paul says many of the Spirit’s gifts will cease in heaven, but expects believers in this life to take full possession of the gifts and power of the Spirit. If we feel weak in serving God, it is to the Holy Spirit we should come, to receive the gifts and power He is longing to give us.

The Holy Spirit may be the “mystery man” of the Godhead, but He is essential to the life and work of the Church, and of individual Christians on earth. Let us draw nearer, and get to know Him better, so we may receive from Him the life, the enlightenment, and the power He has to give.