

Growing in Relationship With the Holy Spirit

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Hello everyone, I'm Karen May, and today we're going to talk about Growing in Relationship with the Holy Spirit or Living a Life on Fire. If you are wondering about the Holy Spirit, if you aren't feeling drawn to learn more about the Holy Spirit, this is the right place for you. Join me as we pray this beautiful prayer by St. Augustine, The Breathe in Me O Holy Spirit.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Breathe in me O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Act in me O Holy Spirit, that my work too may be holy. Draw my heart O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy. Strengthened me O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy. Guard me then O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy, Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

So, most of us don't know a whole lot about the Holy Spirit. It's kind of this ephemeral concept, and even in our creed, very little is said about the Holy Spirit. We hear about God the Father, we hear a lot about Jesus the Son, and then the Holy Spirit, well, He's the giver of life, He proceeds from the Father and the Son, that kind of seems just definitional. He's adored and glorified with them, kind of again like more descriptive as far as like, so great but why are we adoring Him? And then He has spoken through the prophets. And in the Apostles' Creed, all we say is, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church," like that's it. There's just this assumption that you know, what in the world the Holy Spirit is. So, I think for most of us, the Holy Spirit's just kind of this ghost like concept that I don't really know what to do with, I understand the Father, I understand the Son, I understand the Savior even, but the spirit thing is just so non-concrete. So, what are we supposed to do with that?

Well, we have a few symbols that help us to understand what the Holy Spirit is. And even in that, like, what is the Holy Spirit, is a question that I think is asked often. And it's really a who, it's not a thing. It's a person of the Holy Trinity. And so, when we remember that, that helps us to understand that we can have relationship with the Holy Spirit. It's not a thing that we use. It's not a tool that we are given. It is a person in the Holy Trinity that we can have relationship with. And that is fantastic. It's just really amazing to be able to have a relationship with the spirit of God that can breathe in me. That can draw me, that can strengthen me.

The Holy Spirit in Scripture

And so, when we look at these symbols of the Holy Spirit that are scattered throughout scriptures, it helps us to understand a little bit more who the holy scripture or who the Holy Spirit is. A dove, like when Jesus comes out of the waters of baptism, a dove descends, the dove of the Holy Spirit and the voice of the Father says, "this is my beloved Son." And I think in that image

we see the gentleness and the beauty of the Holy Spirit that descends and covers us. But it also, at Pentecost comes as tongues of fire over the apostles. They've been hiding. They've been tucked away. They've been waiting, as Jesus told them, he said, "go back to Jerusalem and wait, "don't do anything until I send my spirit, until I send the advocate, then you'll be ready." And they're sitting in this room and the Holy Spirit comes with this great mighty wind and settles upon them as tongues of fire. So not actual fire, but this descent of the Holy Spirit is so powerful. You can physically feel it. And then the change that happens, they immediately go out and start speaking with this courage and bravery and knowledge and understanding. They've received these gifts of the Holy Spirit that are available to us today. The gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge and counsel that are all just variations of this deep understanding and knowing of who God is, because we have His spirit within us. We have fortitude, we have piety and fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom.

All of these things are gifts from the Holy Spirit and gifts are things that are given freely. We don't earn them. We don't do anything to deserve them. They are given to us out of love. And our only job is to receive them. We may receive one or two. We may receive five or six. Even if we just receive one, it is enough to allow the Holy Spirit to work through us.

Receiving the Breath of Life

And so, these apostles who really were just normal men, here the people who listened to them said, "what are they, how are they so wise? "Because these are just fishermen. "Like I know this guy's father, I know this person. "He's not a rabbi. "He's not learned he hasn't gone to school. "How does he know so much?" So, this understanding and this wisdom, and then this just absolute courage and need to go and proclaim the truth, overwhelms any fear that they've ever had. That is fire, that is absolute fire of the Holy Spirit. And then the Holy Spirit is seen as just a gentle wind or a breath. Jesus breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit within us is a breath, it gives us air so that we have life. It is the giver of life. And in that breath is life and not just physical life, but eternal life, true life, God's life.

And so, when we receive that, then we're called to do something with it. So, it can be gentle. It can be consuming, it can be interior, exterior, it can be a fire. And I can tell you, it can be a fire hose. It can be so overwhelming. I say so often, Lord, you are so overwhelming to me. I cannot even receive all that you have to give me. And it's an amazing feeling because at the same time, I know that through the Holy Spirit, I can receive everything that He's giving to me.

A Personal Encounter

And I know this because when I was going through postpartum depression, after the birth of my second daughter, it was so difficult. And back then, it really wasn't something that was looked for or diagnosed very often. It was often just ignored and just brushed away. It's hard having two children, you're a perfectionist, like you need to relax. It'll be fine.

Even though I went to the doctor several times and said, I'm really having a hard time, but postpartum depression didn't look like I expected it to look. So, I thought, I'm just having a hard time. I'm just having to adjust.

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But in the middle of that time, I started to have this understanding of Jesus that was just opening in a way that it was so beautiful. And that was drawing me closer to Him. And one of the ways that happened was through several books that I was reading, I love to read. And so, as I was in this little book club, or as I read another spiritual book that I had gotten, or somebody had recommended a book, each one of those spoke to me so soundly and deeply and grew in me this understanding of Jesus as a person, not some story long ago, but as a person who had skin on, a person that I could speak to and relate to. And other books helped me to see that I really longed for a relationship with Him. I wanted to speak to Him. I wanted to sit with Him and just be present and listened to Him speak to my heart. And I longed for that.

And it's not that I had not practiced my faith. I was a Catholic from birth and I went to church even in college. So, I was practicing my faith. I knew that God was real. I knew that He was part of my life, but it was much more of like a master of ceremonies, way up high in the sky who would just come and work in my life a little bit and help me out or give me some blessings and it was all wonderful. And He was there in difficult times for me, but it was really from a very distant God.

And all of a sudden, He was becoming closer, and I longed for that. I wanted so very deeply to be connected to Him. And at one point I was riding my exercise bike, my little stationary bike in my home because that's something else that I like to do just to exercise. And as I'm reading one of my books on my bike, I all of a sudden felt this physical descent of the Holy Spirit. And that's the only way I can describe it. It was this powerful feeling of grace and love and deep in my soul I knew it was the Holy Spirit. And at that second, my depression lifted. There was not room for both of them in there.

And as I looked up, because it physically startled me, my vision had changed. It was like I had gotten new glasses because the edges of the windows were so much crisper than they had been. And it's like that allergy medication commercial, where they pull off the haze and all of a sudden, it's much clearer, much brighter. And it didn't really realize that it wasn't before. And this came over me and all of a sudden, my heart was opened, and I could have those conversations. I could see Jesus in my life. I knew deeply that He was so close to me, that He was closer to me than myself. And I can't even explain to you how deeply I understood that.

And I was completely overwhelmed, completely overwhelmed because I knew this to be true on such a deep level and I had no idea what to do with it. I was nothing special. I was some person who had gone to church faithfully. I prayed here and there. I read books. I didn't really know.

He is Waiting For Us

But what I did know is that the pastor at my church had told us his story about how he had been in prayer one time in church. And he had this vision of Jesus cradling Him and saying, "I want you to be my priest." And he looked at him and said, "no, you don't. I am not a good guy." And he said, he wasn't. And Jesus said, "I do want you." And then he described Jesus taking his life, like a teacup against a cement wall and shattering it into pieces and then putting it back together. And he was telling us his story from the pulpit as a priest in the Roman Catholic Church, and his life had been completely transformed.

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And so, after I had this experience, which again was so overwhelming, and I had no idea what to do with it. I went to mass that weekend and afterwards I went up to this priest who really didn't know me from Adam. He had maybe seen me a few times. I was actually a lector, but that's the only involvement I had in this church. I came in, we talked maybe for a minute before I went up, went to mass. And then I went and did my reading, and I went home, and that was once every several weeks for a few months, like I had not known him for very long at all.

And I walked up to him, and I said, I have to talk to you because I feel like I'm living your story, except I'm on a roller coaster. And we are heading down the hill and I don't have my seatbelt on. I'm holding on for dear life and I don't know what this is. And he looked me in the eyes, and he said, "I've been waiting for you." And I broke down and cried.

This is the love of God. This is the love of the Holy Spirit. That when He draws you, when He brings you, when He overwhelms you, He is also prepared for you. He'd been waiting for me. How did He even know me? To this day I don't know, but this wonderful priest was perfect for me. I went and met with him week after week to say so, what is this? How do I do this? How do I continue this? Cause I don't want to lose this. I don't want to lose this, but I also don't want to be some crazy lady that goes on the news and she's like some Jesus freak that really makes no sense. Like, am I losing my mind or is this real?

And he helped me to discern what was real. He helped me to receive these gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety, fear of the Lord and see how each one of them was working in my life. He helped me to see that my husband who was an atheist, who now I had a chasm of faith from him, this huge division of faith. He helped me to have patience to wait and allow the Holy Spirit to work on him. And eventually to be grateful for the ways that he had brought me so far so that when my husband came to faith, he didn't leapfrog me and didn't have nowhere to go. I was ready for him. And I was there to help him jump across.

Follow Him, Allow Him to Speak to You and Lead You

And so, as we receive the Holy Spirit, this life that He gives us is so much different. And I'm here to tell you that this isn't limited to some saint who is flying and levitating or sitting in hours and hours of prayer. This Holy Spirit is given to each one of us. If you have a longing in your heart, if this is one of the steps that is drawing you closer to Him, follow it, allow Him to speak to you, allow Him to lead you because when you receive Him, and sometimes it may be in a large dramatic moment like mine. But I also received the Holy Spirit in these little, small moments.

In these moments when I'm trying to make something happen, I'm trying to make a recording, or I'm trying to give a talk and I can't, like everything is getting in the way, nothing is working. The electricity goes out and a lawnmower shows up and a tree chipper, who has a tree chipper in their neighborhood? I do when I'm trying to record something. And I see those moments and I'm like, okay, this is so ridiculous that there's got to be something in here that is being blocked. Like, why Lord are you blocking me? Holy Spirit, you've got to tell me what to do, 'cause clearly, I'm not it right.

Even in those small moments, allowing the spirit to break through and speak to you. And when you start to do that, when you are living in that life of the spirit, you will start to bear fruit, cause the gifts are given freely, right? We received gifts. We don't deserve gifts. We don't earn the gifts, we receive gifts, but fruits are something different.

Just Like a Healthy Tree

If you have a healthy tree, it will produce much fruit. We had a lemon tree before our Austin freeze, and it was so bountiful, and it was so healthy that we could provide fruit for so many people. We gave it to our daughter, and we gave it to some friends. We had like four or five batches we gave to neighbors, and we have plenty for ourselves. This tree was so healthy, but the year before our Austin freeze, the leaves were kind of yellow. There was something that was happening. It was just not quite right. And there weren't nearly as many fruits we had maybe 20. And so, we could give some to our daughter. We could give a little bit to the friends that we had given it to, and we had a little bit left for ourselves. So, something was off on this tree and sure enough, I didn't know that it would've made it anyway, but it didn't make it through the freeze.

So, when we are living a life in the spirit, we will bear fruit. If we are deeply rooted in the spirit of God, there's no way we can do anything but bear the fruits, the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, who doesn't want a life filled with that? And if you look at your life and you're missing some of those pay attention, like, what am I not, how am I not deeply rooted? What am I missing? How do I need to reconnect to the spirit of God and allow Him to live through me to live this life that's on fire, how can I do this?

Obviously in prayer, but even in prayer, sometimes we just don't know how to pray. And Paul tells us that we can look to the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit prays in unexpressible groanings because He knows the depths of our hearts. And sometimes I just give it over to the Holy Spirit. Like, "I don't even know what to pray here, Lord, I don't know what to pray here Holy Spirit, you have got to do it for me." And I allow that, I just sit and allow the Holy Spirit to pray for me, knowing that he knows what I need, that he knows my heart, that he knows my deepest desires and he will bring those to heaven.

Supplement with the Holy Scriptures

We need to read the holy scriptures. We need to read inspirational materials, whether it's a blog or listening to a podcast or books and studies on the Holy Spirit, allow yourself to be spoken to through the scriptures. When something hits you, when something connects with you, that's the Holy Spirit allowing that word to come to you, to strengthen you so that you have a reason for hope, you have a way to explain your faith because you understand, you know, and you can give wise counsel.

And so, we don't hold back. And also, I think a beautiful place for us to look at living in life in the Holy Spirit is the Book of Acts. As I said before, like the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles like tongues of fire, and then read the Acts of the apostles knowing that these are just simple men who honestly, throughout the gospels really got it wrong a lot. They're trying, but they're asking,

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can I sit at your right hand and your left? And why don't we make a tabernacle here for you? And don't go into Jerusalem, you're going to die. And Jesus constantly correcting them and helping them to understand and explaining the parables to them. Like they didn't have it all together, but the Holy Spirit came and just look at the things that they do, their healing, there speaking, they're prophesying, they're evangelizing and spreading the beautiful news of the gospel without fear, even when they're brought into prison or beaten and they survive, they survive the most amazing things that they really should not. And they even bring people back to life.

Like Paul, at one point in Acts 20, is speaking and speaking and speaking, and he speaks so long that a young man sitting in a window falls asleep, and apparently not dynamic enough to keep this person awake. And he falls out the window and dies. And Paul runs out to him, lays on him and rises saying he is alive.

Let the Holy Spirit Come In

Jesus says, "you will receive the Holy Spirit. You will do the works that I do and more." We do so much more and I'm probably not going to raise somebody from the dead, but the power that comes from the Holy Spirit, the power to speak in those times that I don't know what I'm going to say is incredible.

There are times that I'm like I have somebody come to me or I just walk up to somebody, and I just feel like I need to say something to that person, a word of comfort or encouragement, or just a word, just a hello or a smile. And the number of times that I receive back, that's exactly what I needed. I needed that text that you sent me. I needed to hear your voice. I needed someone to tell me that I was okay. That's not me, that's the Holy Spirit. And when we do things like that, the more that we recognize that, the more we open hearts to allow the Holy Spirit to enter, to breathe in us, to act in us, to draw us closer and to strengthen us. And in that, we live in life that is on fire.

I pray for you that this has helped you to long for Him because in that longing is a reaction and a response from the Holy Spirit. In that longing is an invitation for the Holy Spirit to enter. And that's all he needs, just a little bit, a little bit of opening and he'll come in. I pray that the Holy Spirit comes to you in a way that overwhelms you, but at the same time strengthens you beyond anything you thought you could be, let us pray.

Closing Prayer

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and in kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the Earth. Oh God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, granted by the same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations through Christ our Lord, Amen. In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

May God bless you.