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New Life in Jesus Life in the Spirit Seminar Session Two Monday, May 9, 2011
7:00 PM

This Life in the Spirit Seminar is not about information; it's really about **formation**, and eventually it is something that we have to respond to from within ourselves. Tonight's topic is New Life.

Now we believe, and the Bible clearly states, that the Father has willed us to have new life. There is hardly anybody on earth now or at any age who has not felt that life on earth is not what it should be. Human beings have built into themselves **a desire for more**, for more than meets the eye and for more than we have ever been able to embrace. **That is a natural desire and it's a holy desire. That desire can only be filled through God's work, and God has worked in Christ to bring us new life.**

So whenever as Christians we gather, we always begin with Christ and recognize the mystery of the Incarnation, meaning the mystery of the embodiment of God's Word in the person of Christ. We see that even though Jesus was and is now the Son of God fully human, nonetheless, **Jesus received the Holy Spirit in the Jordan River**, and this was the meaning of his baptism. Now you may wonder why Jesus needed to be baptized; why Jesus needed the Holy Spirit. But he did, of course, in his human nature. **Our human nature is designed for the Spirit, but doesn't have it by itself automatically.** Once again, I alluded to this last week when I quoted John's story about Jesus and Nicodemus where Jesus tells Nicodemus: "Flesh begets flesh; spirit begets spirit." **This is true even for the flesh of Jesus. He needed the gift of the Spirit in addition to, as a complement to, the gift of life, which was also from the Holy Spirit**, because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit. But that life conceived by the Spirit needed fulfillment in the Spirit, and that's why he was baptized in the Jordan.

When he rose from the waters of the Jordan, a voice was heard. Now one evangelist said Jesus heard the voice; another evangelist said others heard the voice. We don't know about who heard the voice, but a voice was heard that said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." **He is the model for all those who follow in his name, that we are all to become beloved daughters and sons of the Father** in whom the Father is well pleased. **But that requires the gift of the Spirit.** We cannot please God on our own, through our own force, through our own work, so to speak.

Now after—after—the death and resurrection of Christ, then and only then did he **impart the Spirit to his disciples.** Now this did not only happen at, quote, "Pentecost." It happened on the night of Easter itself when he went into the upper room and he breathed on them the Holy Spirit and said, "Receive the Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them." So **Jesus is our model in accepting the Spirit and in exercising the Spirit in service.**

When already a young man and after he had just received the Spirit, Jesus went home to **Nazareth** to the synagogue, and he entered the **synagogue to do the reading.** Well, Jewish young men do the readings in the beginning of the synagogue service. So he did

this, as he had done before. But he picked the scroll, now whether this was by chance, I don't know, but he got the scroll of Isaiah that said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind." Then he added, "**This passage is fulfilled in your hearing.**"

Now Luke tells us a rather strange thing, that the people on the one hand were marveling—marveling—at what they heard, and then they became very angry and tried to throw him over the brow of the hill. And so it is with **the work of the Spirit**. There is **something very attractive about it**, and yet there is something in us, let's say, that rejects it, that wants to reject it, that finds it like an antibody, wants to get rid of it. It doesn't fit; **it doesn't feel right**. Well, that's true. There is something about the Spirit that is different, **totally different, from what we are used to in our ordinary human life**. And so there will be **little shocks along the way. Some will be pleasant, some not so pleasant. That's the cost of growth.**

Now the effects of the Holy Spirit touch both our souls and our spirits, as well, of course, our bodies, but I'm not focusing on bodies today, but rather soul and spirit. Now I would like to describe to you something that maybe doesn't actually exist, but it's a good way of talking about what does exist, because we are talking about the spirit, our spirit, not the Holy Spirit, our spirit. We have a spirit. We have a soul. We are capable of great sensitivity and great feeling, which is both good and bad. It has good and bad aspects to it. We are also capable of knowledge. We are capable of seeing, but we are often blind. **Now the Spirit is going to affect our spirits and our souls in great ways, ways that are going to bring new faculties and new feelings and new sensations.**

But I want to talk about part of the way we are as human beings. There is, as it were, some sort of membrane that surrounds our spirits, some sort of membrane—I can't say it's a physical thing; I can't say it's a spiritual thing—I'm describing **some sort of separation that surrounds us and keeps us as an individual**. Now this serves a good purpose; this serves a purpose of helping us grow up to be individuals. Since every single human person is unique, that uniqueness has to be in some way preserved, so we have **some sort of preservation; I call it a "membrane."** The problem is this membrane can become very coarse, very thick, and even impenetrable. Now this is not good. What happens when this results in our lives is that we end up with no ability to communicate or feel anything outside of our own little lives, so we become small, and we become isolated, and **we feel isolation. We are not in touch with other members of the human race.**

Now there are **two ways we can respond to this condition**. One is to live all by ourselves not caring about anybody else, which is the way, you might say, of overt sin. **Overt sin just says I don't care; I'm going to live for me; the rest of the world can take care of itself.** But another way we can live, if we are not really overtly rebellious, we maybe actually have a good heart, we do care about other people, but because of this isolation **we feel very helpless and we feel very lonely and we are full of anxiety and worry** because we sense our powerlessness to care for people other than ourselves, and

sometimes we are powerless even to take care of ourselves. And this state is depressing, which is not a healthy state.

Now theologians say that **this condition is the result of original sin**; it is not the result of personal sin. **Personal sin is what I choose.** Original sin is a condition we are born into. What is sin? **In the Bible, “sin,” *harmartia* in Greek, means “missing the mark.”** The word actually comes from archery. So if you are trying to shoot an arrow with a bow at a target and you miss; that’s *harmartia* in Greek. That’s the word used in the New Testament for sin, not in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament other words are used that refer to trespass, the breaking of law, and so on. But **in the New Testament** it’s this missing the mark. **What original sin means is that from the very beginning of human history, human beings have missed the mark.** They have never understood what God really wants for us and therefore we have not as a family, as a species, cooperated. We have not lived up to the great hope God had in creating us in his own image and likeness. This is what is meant by original sin.

If you’d like to think about this **membrane** now, you could **think of it also as a scab.** A scab really is part of the **process of healing.** Well, **sin is a wound.** So now the wound is going to be scabbed over, but then the scab breaks because we are vulnerable, and we are wounded again. We try to trust this person or that person, we extend ourselves in love to this person or that person, but because it’s not based on God, **we are trying to do it all on our own, we end up hurt again, more wounded than before.** This scab then just reforms and becomes thicker and the wound becomes more tender.

Now **it is the work of the Spirit to transform and to heal this membrane, this scab.** To help us to form new connections we are called, we are baptized, into the body of Christ. **We are to live as a body connected with other members. So the Spirit makes this membrane more permeable, more transparent, more translucent, and it helps us feel differently about ourselves. We start to have intuitions and we start to know things** and we don’t know why we know them, but either from Christ the head or from another member we have some sort of contact.

And incidentally, recently scientific studies have proved that **there are spiritual forms of communication.** The professors and the scholars who have proved this have been blackballed in several universities because it goes against the materialistic philosophy, which is in vogue. One full professor in California has tenure; they have to pay him his salary, but they won’t let him teach any classes. If students want to work under him, they warn people: they say, “Well, he is kind of weird; he believes in spirituality.” And several others I have read about.

Now when I was ordained ten years, my mother set about to have a big celebration. I was a little embarrassed. She invited all these priests and she had a big party planned and dinner and everything. And I said, “Well, Mom, I hate to tell you, but this is really not kosher; I mean, I’m only ordained ten years! These kinds of celebrations are usually at twenty-five years.” And she looked at me and she said, “I won’t be with you at your twenty-fifth.” And the next year she died suddenly of an aneurysm. Now how did she know she wasn’t going to be with me? I don’t know, but she did. She seemed to know.

We get these inclinations, these intuitions, these senses of things. Now they are not infallible. And John says, “Test every spirit.” That means test every intuition, test every sensation you have that you might know something, but they are real and we are part of something bigger than ourselves. And we recognize how **Scripture**—and this is how I myself was affected most by Baptism of the Holy Spirit. When I was in seminary I studied and studied. I studied Hebrew. I studied all kinds of history, and I studied words, and it was good. I am glad I did that. But I still looked at the Bible the way I would look at any other literature. I would read it and wonder, hmm, wonder what this author really meant, hmm, well, could be, hmm. But then **when I was baptized in the Spirit all of a sudden it spoke to me**—it spoke to me! And I knew what it meant. It’s not that I know all of what it means; I know what it meant for me. And this is **a big difference between meaning and what something says**. Scholars can tell you what it says, but what it means, that’s something the Spirit tells us. And I found that’s true. I was able then to take things and just go over them and the **Spirit just led me to see things and to teach things**. And sometimes people would say, “Well, that was a remarkable teaching.” I would say, “What was it?” Because sometimes I really had not prepared what I said at all; it was the **Spirit speaking through me**. That was the way the Spirit touched me, at least one of the ways.

Now in Matthew, for example, it says, “all you who are weary and find life burdensome, come to me. I will refresh you. My yoke is easy, my burden light.” Now I heard that sung for years. I never quite understood how Jesus is telling us that he is in our lives working with us. **“My yoke is easy.”** Well, the yoke means, of course, is an instrument that is put on oxen so they can draw a plow. And Jesus is saying, well, I’m drawing with you; you and I are together plowing your field. So it’s not that God does things for us necessarily. **It is not that God takes us out of our problems, but God is in our problems, with us and leading us through them.** This has come to me so often in so many different ways since **the Spirit has helped me to see things**.

Now the ultimate in transparency and translucency of these membranes are **mystics**. Mystics are people, and in the Catholic tradition most are female, people who are so in touch with the whole of the universe, the whole of creation, which is in God because “we live and move and have our being in God,” that they just **have this wonderful sense of the unity of everything, how everything fits together, and how love is supporting everything**. Let’s face it: there are times when we need some kind of vision beyond our eyes to see how love is supporting everything because it doesn’t seem that way.

Now when we say that we choose Jesus as Lord, what does that mean? The word “lord,” *kyrios* in Greek, is a word the Jews use for God. They didn’t call God “*Yahweh*” because they thought that was inappropriate to use that word, so they called him “*Kyrios*” in Greek or they called him “*Shem*” in Hebrew, meaning “Name,” They just say “the name,” “Ha Shem”; they meant the name of God, or they would say “*El*” or “*Elohim*” or “*El-yon*.” These are different words referring to God, but not his name. So when the New Testament says, **“Jesus Christ is Lord,” it means Jesus Christ is divine**, but when we accept him, choose him, as Lord, **it means that we are accepting him as the master of our life**—the master of our own life.

And **this is a personal choice.** It is the meaning of water Baptism because **Baptism is in water and Spirit.** But we don't necessarily follow through in the choices we make, especially if we are baptized as infants. I'll get to that in a minute. But **the gift can be given distinctly at a different time from when we actually take it in.** So **choosing Jesus as Lord is actually choosing to live a life of Baptism.** It takes a choice to let God be the center of our lives. Now let me make it very clear, we don't make God the center of our lives. That would be us doing it. **We let God become the center of our lives.** We are actually created this way. **We are created for God to be the center of our lives.** God is the ground of all being: "I AM WHO AM." If we are natural and respond naturally to God, we will let God be, but we are not natural. **We have been wounded, warped by that original sin.** Sometimes we have **added to that with personal sins,** personal habits, which are very negative. **The Holy Spirit will help us overcome those habits and restore us to our natural hearts.**

The Spirit also does the work of outfitting us with the gifts we need. Now we have **natural gifts; we have preternatural gifts and supernatural gifts.** You can call all of them "graces," if you like. Teresa of Avila, for example, would talk about the grace of **the sense of humor.** She said that's a natural grace; that's a nice way of thinking. It's a gift. Some people don't have a sense of humor—they don't! And if you try to tell them a joke or whatever, get them to laugh, they don't see it; they don't think it's funny. It is a gift, but **it's a natural gift. Supernatural gifts are gifts that are directly from the heart of the Father, and they are the ones that really help us live as sons and daughters of him, of God.**

Now we believe as Catholics, and the Catholic Church teaches, that the Spirit and the gift—in the singular—the gift of the Spirit is given to us in the sacraments of initiation of which there are three: **Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist.** We believe that God is imparting gifts. **The gift and the gifts of the Spirit are given in those sacraments.** However, we grow up in a society that encourages habitual self-centeredness; everything is all about me; it's about having it your way, and so on. And so we grow up that way and that behavior, which I would say we adapt to it. We adapt to it because human beings are made adaptable. How would we have survived if we weren't adaptable? We are adaptable, so we adapt. **We adapt to a culture that is egoistic.** And so what happens? **We block the gifts of the Spirit and we make it impossible for the Spirit to manifest itself.** So now we are going to try to see those blocks and **let go of those blocks so that we can be filled with the Spirit and actually utilize all the gifts we have received.**

Now ratifying our initiation to Christ requires therefore a surrender to God—a surrender to God. It may seem frightening to let go of God. You have heard probably the joke about the man that fell off the cliff, and he grabbed on a root, and he started praying. He said, "God, if there is a God, help me!" And there is a voice that said, "Do you believe?" "Yes, yes, I believe!" "Let go." Well, it's not always easy to let go, but that's actually **what we are being led to, is to surrender to God.**

Now that brings us to this idea of **repentance.** Now you have heard the word "repentance." Here it comes from a Greek word, *metanoia*. It's a very important word. I don't know what you think it means, but what it really means is **you have to be ready to**

think in a new way about everything, and that means you have to be willing to **give up what you thought you knew if what you thought you knew isn't quite right**, and it often isn't. We grow up with ideas. Where do they come from? I don't know. Later on people say, "Well, the nuns told us," or "The priest told us," or this one told us or that one told us. Well, maybe, maybe not. Don't forget, you were listening and maybe you didn't understand what the nun was trying to say. Maybe you did; maybe you didn't. Maybe she was wrong; maybe you were wrong. It doesn't matter. What matters is you let go of what doesn't help you, what isn't really gospel. Jesus put it this way: **receive a new mind; be new minded; believe in the gospel**—believe in the gospel, believe in the good news. Everybody believes in something. People say, "Well, we live in a skeptical age; people don't believe in anything." Yeah, they do. They believe in themselves. They believe in their ability to gather evidence. That's actually just more egoism. **Skepticism is rooted in egoism**. Yeah, people believe in something. But Jesus said, "Believe in the good news." And that means **allow God to take God's proper place at the center of awareness, and this of course requires giving God time**. We have to have some serious prayer in our lives. We have to spend some serious time in prayer. Now what that means in your life, I can't tell you. It has got to be something. There's got to be some time you give to God.

Baptism in the Spirit also changes the way we desire and what we desire, not only what we think, how we talk, but actually what we want. When Jesus says, "Pray without ceasing," he doesn't mean say prayers without ceasing. That would be stupid. That would be impossible. We can't say prayers without ceasing. Pray without ceasing means desire without ceasing, want without ceasing. "Pray, to pray" means "to want, to ask." What we want is asking. What are you asking for every day? **What is it you really want all the time?** If we examine ourselves, we might find out that a lot of things we want aren't that particularly important. They may be good or not or may be neutral, but they are not that important. But when we want what God wants for us—and this is something I am absolutely convinced of—that **God wants for us so many blessings, and we are not open to them! We do have to ask**. We have to ask for the wonderful things God wants to do for us. So pray without ceasing means that: want always, desire.

Now this leads to a **renewed heart**. By "heart" I refer to our feeling nature. Our feeling nature is really very important; **it is really our soul**. What I have talked about thus far is spirit. Now I am talking about soul. **Our souls can be very easily dominated by negative energy, negative emotion**, like fear, anxiety, anger—just to name a few. Now very often we simply accept this. We say, "Well, he is just that kind of person; that's just the way he is." Well, if it's negative, it's not acceptable. God doesn't want people to be full of fear. Now the fear of the Lord is the fear you learn; it's not the fear that dominates and paralyzes. God does not want that. **God does not want people to be dominated by anger**. You know people—they are always upset about something; they are always mad about something. Why? Well, somehow God isn't in their life in a very vibrant way. Somehow their soul has become habituated to this way of behaving.

Now there are lots of things to be angry about, mind you. But that doesn't mean we should be dominated by anger. There is a big difference. Now I understand that some scientists have studied anger in the body, and they say at first it has this chemical reaction

and it's very healthy, then it starts to have all kinds of unhealthy reactions as it seethes. **So anger can become a poison, even according to secular science.**

So when we surrender to God and we let God take center stage of our spirit, then our souls start to change. They are not dominated any more by these energies, by these habits—they are habits really. We start to let go of them. Now some people maybe have a more difficult problem than someone else letting go. Some of these negative emotions may have deeper roots in some people than in others. But we do let go of fear, anxiety, anger, and other negative emotions. **And we start to be able to see and resist the traps that we call the “seven deadly sins,”** although I think there are more than seven. They are **all about things that are good in themselves, but get out of order.** The technical word is they become inordinate; they become excessive. So, for example, anger, which is good; you should be angry about injustice, but then your whole life shouldn't be about wrath, making you a wrathful person, bullying person, because you were hurt or because you are afraid, so then you go around bullying people. That's not right. Nor is it good for you because you are so upset because the world isn't better. That's not good for you to be seething inside with resentments. That just hurts you. You don't need that. So that's a deadly sin. That's why we call it that. **It's not a sin you choose so much as it's a condition that warps everything and actually leads to sin.** That's why it's called a “sin,” because it leads to sin anyway.

Pride—**pride is good if it is self-esteem, but pride can become self-centered egoism when everything is about me and what I want.** And so it is you go through the list. It's wonderful to have ability to appreciate good food, for example. But some people are **gluttonous.** What's happening? They are **trying to fill up their emptiness,** their spiritual emptiness, with food. So it is with everything. I add to the list of capital sins or deadly sins distrust. I think **distrust** is actually something very negative—**emotion that leads people away from trusting, surrendering to God. Through the Spirit we start to avoid these traps and we are strengthened in the virtues that these are a negation of.**

So the positive emotions listed by St. Paul are called “**fruits of the Spirit.**” What are fruits of the Spirit? They are **godly ways of feeling and they are ways in which the Spirit bears fruit, if you want to put it that way, in our souls so that we can enjoy the Spirit.** There are nine of them.

Charity—**charity means love for no reason.** Charity is love for no reason. This is the nature of God. God is love and God loves for no reason except that God is love and the fruit of the Spirit is that we are able to do the same thing. We love people not because they are friends. Jesus said, “Love your enemies,” which of course people at that time thought was crazy. Well, with the fruit of the Spirit it's not. **You can love your enemies.**

Joy—try to get joy; try to make joy. You can't make joy. Joy is not something you can fabricate. People today talk about happiness. They want to be happy, whatever that's supposed to mean. Sometimes it means that somebody does what they want, or they acquire something that they want, but that's not happiness. **Joy is an indescribable sense of lightness that comes from the Holy Spirit.** Now sometimes children can experience joy in a very natural way. But in my experience, as adults we need the Spirit to

experience any true joy as we witness all the problems in life. And the way the Spirit works is **the Spirit doesn't take away all the problems. The Spirit works in the problems.**

Peace—the peace that the Spirit gives is not like the peace the world gives; it's not absence of conflict. **It's a sense of peace within the conflict.**

Patience, patience—I never had any patience. My dad used to say that. He would say, “You have to be patient.” I would say, “How can I be patient when I'm not patient!” But I can tell you that in the Spirit I have very often been told, “Well, you are very patient.” I think to myself, well, that is not me!

Kindness, kindness—**kindness is a gentleness. The Spirit is gentle.** That's why the Spirit can be shoved away rather easily. That's why it says when Jesus was baptized the Spirit descended like a dove. It means that the descent was gentle, not like an eagle trying to get a fish.

Generosity—generosity is a fruit of the Spirit. One of the great works of the Law was almsgiving because possessiveness is always a problem for everybody. I mean, you ask the richest man in the world what he wants—more! So **generosity is the ability to let go of what you own and help people that you have no responsibility for** in a normal sense. Of course, **through the Spirit you start to have the sense that you are responsible for everybody** in a way, not in a way that makes you feel that you are guilty, but rather in a way that **you just want to contribute to the welfare of everyone.**

Longsuffering—it's sometimes called “**fidelity.**” This means being able to suffer through. You know, the Church would not exist if it weren't for the gift of **longsuffering martyrs.** There have never been more martyrs than in the twentieth century. There were more martyrs in the twentieth century than for all the centuries prior. That is a gift; you can't do it on your own, especially you can't do it with kindness and joy—**you can't endure, but in the Spirit you can.**

Nonviolence sometimes called “**meekness**” or “**mildness.**” It means the **total surrender of all violence.** Some people think that Hinduism is all about nonviolence. But Gandhi did not learn nonviolence from Hinduism. He claimed he learned it from Christ—he learned nonviolence from Christ. People said, “Why didn't you become a Christian?” He said, “Oh, I haven't met one.” But he really learned it from Christ, although they do talk about *ahimsa*, which is supposed to be nonviolence, but he really learned all about it from Christ.

And then self-control—self-control. It's amazing; people say they want to do what they want. But what is it they want? **Self-control helps us to choose wisely what we really want and follow that.**

Anyway, **these become habitual ways of feeling. But they are going to start causing conflicts with the world around us,** perhaps even our **families** who maybe don't experience that. Messages are coming from our society contradicting this. Plus the **father of lies** is trying to deceive us and make us believe something other than the gospel. But

actually if you think about it, **if you believe in the gospel, there is no more logical way of feeling than being loving, joyful, nonviolent, longsuffering, generous, kind, patient, and self-controlled.**

Now when the Spirit gives us gifts some of these gifts are not emotional; some of them manifest themselves in other ways, for example, **the gift of tongues.** Now some people think that the gift of tongues is irrelevant. I personally think the gift of tongues is a wonderful gift. What it is, is our minds are dominated by words. If you want to sit and think without using words, good luck! You can't. It's like if you sit and say I'm going to sit and I'm not going to think about a white elephant—I'm not going to think about a white elephant—you can't not think about a white elephant! **So the gift of tongues is a gift to release our minds from the domination of words,** because words are just little boxes. There are words and there is the Word. If you want to get into the Word, you have to get beyond the words. The gift of tongues is a very simple way God has to letting us get beyond the words. This gift of tongues is actually a prayer; it's a gift of prayer; **it's a way of praying, and you can use it all the time**—in the car, any time.

Prophecy—yes, the gift of prophecy is a **gift of divine guidance.** Some people think that these gifts are all limited to the past. No. Now some people misunderstand prophecy. They might imagine that it's going to be a foretelling of something. That's not necessarily what prophecy is.

There are many other ways in which the Spirit makes things live. Liturgy starts to live. The Eucharist helps us become contemplative in a way that wasn't perhaps possible before. People might have inspired songs. That might be unusual, but actually I know someone who the Lord gives him songs. The Lord gave Handel, you know, the Messiah—fourteen days he got the whole thing. That's a gift from the Spirit. **And we become more attached to the body of Christ.** We become more aware of others and more aware of God in others. And so **everything is reshuffled. Our feelings are changed. Our minds are expanded, and God brings us new life.** Praise God!