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Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Charismatic Gifts in the life of the Church

Monday, January 30, 2006 7:00 p.m. Adult Formation/Spiritual Life

Good evening, everyone. Let's begin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, we ask you to send your Holy Spirit into our hearts that we may have the gifts of understanding, wisdom, and knowledge to grasp whatever it is you want us to grasp this evening for our own growth and development. And we ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Well the talk that you heard mentioned of is very different from tonight's talk, because I was giving this to a different kind of group.

How many of you have actually heard of the term "Baptism in the Holy Spirit"? So some of you have heard of it already. Now I don't know whether what you think of is really what we need to think of. I know people don't like to be read to, but I want to read a few texts from Scripture to show you how Baptism in the Holy Spirit is fundamental to the idea of the New Testament. When we look at the gospel of Matthew, very early on, it says, John the Baptist speaking in Chapter 3:11: "I baptize you with water, for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." So that's how the idea is introduced in Matthew.

In Mark we have a very similar statement. Again, it's John the Baptist speaking. He says, "I baptize you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Mark doesn't add "and fire," just Spirit.

In Luke we have, again, John the Baptist speaking: "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." So he is paralleling the first one, which is Matthew.

Luke also is the author of the Acts of the Apostles. In the Acts of the Apostles it begins, Chapter 1:4, "And while staying with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for 'the promise of the Father,' which he said you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

So actually all four gospels plus the Acts of the Apostles begin with a reference to Baptism in the Holy Spirit. So the career of Jesus, if you will, is really led by the Holy Spirit, and baptism of the Holy Spirit is the way in which this Spirit comes.

Now what does the word "baptism" actually mean? To baptize means "to dunk." So it doesn't really help us too much to think literally about the meaning of the word—"baptism, to dunk." But we have to see it in conjunction with the baptism of water and the baptism of John.

Now you will recall that Jesus himself was baptized, and that is why it became a sacrament of the Church. When Jesus was baptized it says, “The skies opened and Jesus heard a voice,” that’s what one evangelist says. Another evangelist says, “and the people heard a voice: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And they saw the Spirit descend like a dove.” Now some people think this means that the Spirit took the form of a dove. I don’t think it means that. I think it means they experienced the Spirit descending gently. So the dove descends very gently, not like a eagle—gently.

So Jesus’ entire ministry begins then with this gentle gift of Spirit, and then he carries the power of the Spirit into his work. We see the power of the Spirit alive in his hands, in his words, in all that he does. But not only that, again, back to the word “baptism,” Jesus says at one point, “I have a baptism to receive. Would that it were already ignited.” Now “ignited” matches fire. “And he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire,” in two evangelists.

So what is this idea of fire? Well, **the baptism of fire really refers to the passion**, to what Jesus endured on the cross. That’s the fire. And somehow the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the fire go together, as both Luke and Matthew tell us, because the Holy Spirit is not simply about being gentle. **It’s also about being strong and courageous and, therefore, witnessing.**

Now the works of Jesus and the words of Jesus witness to the Father’s will. That’s how we tie everything together, because what is Jesus doing? He is not just trying to impress people. He is not trying to make friends. He is trying to express the Father’s will, often changing people’s idea of what God is all about, what God really wants. But when Jesus accepts the cross he is doing the same thing. **He is accepting the Father’s will.**

Now how do we understand that? That’s something we have to grapple with. Do we understand that Jesus is sent into the world in order to suffer? Some people have thought this. Or is it the suffering is simply the consequence of **faithful obedience to love itself?** If you think about this, obedience is very different from conformity. **Conformity has as its object fitting in. Obedience has as its object something else: conscious following and living out of something.** You don’t want your children, if you have children, you don’t want them to be conformists, because you know very well that they will conform to the wrong thing sooner or later. But you want to teach them obedience, meaning **consciously following instructions.**

So if Jesus died in obedience to the Father’s will, and this has something to do with his Baptism in fire, then it has something to do with the Father’s heart. The Father’s heart is a heart of love. So **what Jesus does in accepting suffering is he is living out his message of love.** He can retaliate, but he chooses not to. He can overcome with power; he chooses not to. He can punish sinners; he chooses not to. Indeed, **he chooses to absorb in himself the very punishment that justice requires in an unjust world;** that is, violence once unleashed simply grows unabated until he absorbs it. Jesus gave the world a new chance because in him, in his Baptism of fire, his Baptism in the Holy Spirit,

he retold, if you will, or allowed to be retold, if you will, **the story of suffering and the story of victimhood from the standpoint of the victim.** In the proclamation of the gospel that is what we hear. We hear the story that has always been going on in the history of the world. “Might makes right. The strong abuse the weak. No good deed goes unpunished.”

That basic order that exists in this disordered world, we see that now being told from the standpoint of the victim. **In the believers,** who accept Jesus as savior, there is a new attitude; there must be **a new attitude,** toward love, toward suffering, toward violence, toward forgiveness, since on the cross Jesus forgives all those who have put him there. Not only does he forgive, but **he creates a reconciliation,** since forgiveness is a one-way street. I forgive my enemies so that I can walk with freedom from all feelings of vengeance and anger and all those other emotions that can poison my life, so I forgive in order to be free of that. Reconciliation is something else. I have to have your help in reconciliation. I can forgive you, but I cannot create reconciliation. I need you to accept this. But Jesus is God-man. In his divine humanity, in his incarnate divinity, he brings together both sides. So **he provides not only forgiveness, but reconciliation, because having been offended he can now forgive, and having been offended he can identify also with the offender—as he does!** And that goes back to his Baptism in the Jordan, when he became one with all sinners. We need to think about this: how Jesus identifies with the sinner. Jesus identifies with the offender, and Jesus identifies with the offended. **Because now he is forgiving in his humanity, God can forgive. That forgiveness of God is received in a human heart, in a human nature, in a human life.** That reciprocation is brought together, and our hope as Christian people is that we can live in that reconciliation, that that can become ours. The power of the Eucharist is all tied into our coming to the very cross, which is presented in the sign of bread and wine, his death on the cross, coming to that cross and being empowered to forgive all those who have offended us, who have betrayed us, who have hated us, who have rejected us, who have let us down.

One priest I know encourages people to forgive God, although some people think this is rather brazen, but his logic is perfect: we often feel let down by God. Now I don’t believe God lets anyone down, but **if we feel let down by God or if we have experienced being let down by God, it’s high time we forgive,** because if we don’t, that will become a block. Even if we say to ourselves, well, that’s imaginary, well, of course, God is God and he never let me down, but if we still feel that way, and if we have experienced that, that has to go. It can only go by our choosing to forgive, and **choosing to forgive is letting go—by choice.** It doesn’t mean that immediately we are going to experience the fullness of freedom, but it means we can.

So if we think about this, we are getting very close to the idea of **the power of the Holy Spirit working in the world right now,** not just the name. When I was in grade school, the sister said that the Holy Spirit was the forgotten person of the Blessed Trinity. Well enough, that’s true, but, of course, even the word “person” is not a very good word, as we probably know, because there are not three individuals in God. There is one God. **This one God knows himself perfectly and shares that knowledge in the incarnate**

Christ, but moreover, that God affirms himself and shares that affirmation in the Holy Spirit.

Now, as I said, the Bible doesn't actually tell us what the actual term "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" means; but if we read the Acts of the Apostles, we can get some ideas. In Chapter 2:1 we read: "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire"—tongues as of fire! Don't forget, Spirit and fire. "Distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Then we read in Acts Chapter 10: 44-48: "When Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 'Can anyone forbid water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.'" Then in Acts Chapter 19:6 we read: "And when Paul had laid hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them all. And he entered the synagogue, and for three months spoke boldly arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God. But when some were stubborn and disbelieved speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them, taking the disciples with him and argued daily in the Hall of Tyrannus."

So now we see a little bit about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit by example. These are not totally extensive or totally perfect and full examples of the work of the Holy Spirit, but they express some. So what are they expressing? These are expressing, first of all, the capacity to experience; and that is what I want to underline: **the capacity to experience life in a new way.** Now most theologians in the Catholic Church have come to the conclusion that Baptism in the Holy Spirit must be conveyed to all people. However, most of the time they do not believe it involves an experience. **They think it involves quote "grace," but not experience.** I think that's perhaps not the best way to put it.

Let's look at grace for a moment. First of all, at this point does anybody have any questions?

That I cannot answer. The question is, "**How many times can you receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit?**" I cannot answer that. In one sense—in one sense—we could say there's one time—you can say that: **one time. But we cannot say that the Holy Spirit's power to renew itself knows any limit.** The comment is: "Is not this an ongoing process?" I think that is a good way to think of it—**an ongoing process.**

The question is: "We are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. When does a separate Baptism in the Holy Spirit come about?" I am going to try to point out that there is no separate Baptism in the Holy Spirit—let me try to do that now.

Theology is made up of categories, mental categories, ways of thinking. They can be helpful or they can hinder our theological development and thinking. So I want to bring up some ideas. There was a question that some people have: “Well, I never received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.” Well, maybe you did and maybe you didn’t or maybe you are right now or maybe you need to be more open to the fullness of the Spirit. I mean, all those are possible answers.

But in our theology we describe graces. St. Paul himself makes a very important point that not all graces are the same. If you remember that beautiful poetry he writes: “If I turn my body over to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. If I have the tongues of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong,” and so on. You are familiar with that. So there is a grace that makes us pleasing to God, and that is in our Catholic tradition called “sanctifying grace.” **Now sanctifying grace has to be experienced in our lives, but it doesn’t necessarily have to be experienced in a way that is intrusive to our awareness.** How would you describe a person under that influence of sanctifying grace? What is the easiest way of thinking of the working of sanctifying grace? Number one, what’s number one? What does St. Paul say? What is the door? Well, Baptism is the sign. But what’s the door in terms of qualities within a person’s life? Well, love is the greatest, yes, but that’s not the original door. What’s the door? Well, the repentance is our making ourselves ready for the **first gift of justification, which is called faith**—isn’t it? St. Paul says, “We are justified by faith.” So justification is getting in the right order, in the right arrangement, and that starts faith.

Now what does faith mean in St. Paul? **What is faith?** Hebrews is not St. Paul! “Believing.” Any better word than believing? What does believing mean? “Trusting.” Okay, trusting is better in St. Paul. **Trusting.** And what this trust is, is a **personal willingness to obey, listen to, follow, depend upon, another.** In this case the other is God. **Faith in God is the beginning of our sanctification. It is our justification. That is when things get put in the right order, when we stand before God in a trusting way.**

So we have to understand that the fundamental sin, **the original sin, is distrust.** What happened in the garden of Eden, in that proverbial garden of Eden? What went on in that garden? What went on in that garden is that the evil one convinced the first humans that God was not trustworthy: God doesn’t want you to know. If you eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will be equal to God, and God doesn’t want you to be equal to God. God wants you to be subordinate. He wants to use you. That was the first temptation. It was a temptation to distrust in God. Another way of putting the **original temptation: nobody can love you better than you could love yourself**—nobody can love you better than you could love yourself! That’s the original temptation, and the sin is to go along with this, and then say, “Okay, well, then I will decide what is good for me.” That is **eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. I will decide what is good for me.** You see, that’s the nature of sin.

If we understand what sin really is, distrust of God, then we understand how **Jesus on the cross is reversing sin by trusting totally**, in spite of all evidence to the contrary that God is not reliable. God does not save his beloved from suffering. God doesn't save his beloved from pain. God doesn't save his beloved from death. Jesus said, "I trust in God. I trust in my Father." The redemption of the world begins with that obedience, with that trust, and therefore **in our lives as well it is faith and trust that initiates this reordering of lives. It is called in the Bible "justification."**

But St. Paul also says that the first fruit that is given to believers—we use the word "believer" now for those who have faith, for those who trust, but we have to be careful that we don't fall into the idea that believing means simply holding certain beliefs. That is not belief in a Pauline sense. St. Paul says that the first gift given to believers is the gift of **hope**. That's in one place, and in another place he says, "**The first gift given to those who believe is the Holy Spirit.**" **That's Baptism in the Holy Spirit.** It comes as the first gift to people who have opened themselves to God.

So hope and the Holy Spirit are both first gifts—see, St. Paul is not always consistent. He doesn't always remember what he said the last time—just like me. You say it in a little different way, and it comes out differently. But I want to stress hope here, because it is faith, hope, and love that become the three greatest gifts. St. Paul says that in Corinthians. The three greatest gifts, **three gifts that always remain**, always endure—he means past earthly reality into the divine presence, into our eternal life—**faith, hope, love; and "the greatest is love."** But love doesn't happen without hope and faith. So because of this **we do recognize sanctifying grace.**

We also recognize that there are other graces, other graces, which we already mentioned. Speaking in tongues—let's say angelic tongues—that's a gift. But it's not a sanctifying gift, so what are we going to call it? We will call it a "**gift of service.**" So St. Paul would encourage us to separate these gifts into **two groups: gifts of service and gifts of sanctification.** That is, I think reasonable. Now there are going to be a lot of gifts. What else does he mention there? He mentions **prophecy**. What else does he mention? **Interpreting tongues**. Faith to move mountains—that's a special gift of faith. That's not this faith. Faith to move mountains is a gift of power, so **gifts of power**. I don't know if he mentions there **healing**, but that's another one. That's found in the Acts of the Apostles all the time—healing. St. Peter noticed right away that he could in the name of Jesus command people to be healed, and they were. That was a response to the Baptism in the Holy Spirit that the apostles all experienced in the event we call "Pentecost," although we don't believe today that **Pentecost** was one day or one moment or one hour. That's the way it's presented in the Acts of the Apostles. That seems to be a literary presentation. **It seems actually the Spirit was being given before and after that particular one day.** Okay, so there are many different powers, healings, the power to perform **miracles**. What else? What other gifts are there? **Teaching**. Gift of mercy? Mercy I would put over here with love. **Discernment**, yes. Discernment. Oh, these are all service, **gifts of service**. What else? Yes, healing, I have that. **Evangelizing**. What else? **Word of knowledge**. Now we can think of certain other **vocational gifts**, such as **marriage**. Isn't marriage a gift of the Spirit? **Celibacy**—it's supposed to be a gift of the

Spirit. So we **have to think in broad ways about the gifts of the Spirit**. But the point that St. Paul is making is **none of them are any good if they are not formed with love**. I think St. Paul is right. I think we can accept that. I don't think anyone would object to that.

The problem comes later in our Catholic tradition with the Scholastic theological presentation. **In Scholasticism certain categories were invented, created, for understanding things**—and that's well and good. For whatever reason—for whatever reason—certain virtues or certain gifts were considered sanctifying, besides these three. Now these three are in St. Paul.

St. Thomas Aquinas adds four moral virtues, which he says are gifted to people in Baptism. He says—what are the four great moral virtues? **Prudence** is correct. **Justice**. What else? **Fortitude**, yes, fortitude is. And one more—**temperance**. These are called “moral virtues” or “**cardinal virtues**.” They are called cardinal because **the exercise of the life of virtue depends upon them**. Now Thomas argued this way: if even the pagans can respect these four virtues, then all the more a person living in the Spirit of Christ must have them. **So he figures, well, then God must infuse them at Baptism**.

Now could he see that everybody who was baptized was prudent? Incidentally, what's an English word for prudence? That's kind of an odd word, foreign word. What's a more English word for prudence? Shrewdness—shrewdness. Jesus often speaks of the need for shrewdness. So Thomas says, well, then that is **included among the sanctifying gifts**. All right—prudence.

What about justice; what does justice mean? Not fairness—close though. It means everything in its proper order; everyone gets what they deserve. That's what justice means: everyone gets what they deserve. Now if you talk to a child, their idea of justice is different from an adult's—right? You try to explain to a child, no, that is not unfair because your bother is twelve years older than you are, and so he does get to stay up later. But kids, their sense of fairness is very, very limited. We do have a natural desire for fairness. That natural desire is because **we are created with this capacity for moral conscience**. Yes, justice involves punishment. It involves reward—everything.

Fortitude. What does fortitude mean? Courage in regard to fear. It's an antidote to our natural proclivities to shrink from what is difficult, or to be afraid of what is dangerous. So fortitude is the antidote to that.

What is temperance? It's the antidote to our desires for pleasure—basically. Temperance: keeping things in line.

So **St. Thomas says, well, they are sanctifying gifts because everyone needs them and they affect the quality of their being, their soul**. Then he adds another one, and he says these go with Baptism. Then later on when he is discussing the Sacrament of Confirmation, he will say, “Well, now there are **sevenfold gifts of the Spirit that are found in the Book of Isaiah**. That starts with wisdom, understanding. What else?”

Knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord. Okay, we don't have to go into what they all are. But the point is he says that they are also **sanctifying gifts and they come through the sacraments.**

Now the problem is that according to **Thomas** and according to the Scholastics, **none of the gifts of service come from the sacraments or are attached to the sacraments.** Now why do they say this? I think they say this because they find this somewhat arbitrary. Not everyone, of course, speaks in tongues. Not everyone has prophecy. Not everyone interprets tongues. But, on the other hand, does everyone have temperance? Does everyone have prudence? Is everyone equally loving? **So the gift of the sacrament itself does not mean that everyone is going to receive everything in a perfect fullness.** We receive the gift we can receive. We receive the gifts we are destined to receive in the sense we have a capacity to receive. **Not everyone can receive every gift. It doesn't mean God isn't giving them. It means we are not able to receive them.**

When we see, however, the gifts of service as stemming from Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist, which is a relatively modern theological idea that was first expressed at Vatican II by Cardinal Suenens and Joseph Ratzinger, I believe—he is the new pope. The idea is contained in this orange book I want you to take home and read. The idea is this: that **the Church made a mistake a long time ago in divorcing the gifts of service from the sacramental life of the Church,** and therefore making optional, in a sense unnecessary, the many gifts that the Spirit gives, in some cases totally denigrating them. Now misunderstanding I understand, but denigrating I don't!

Like, for example, the gift of tongues—some people say, “**What is the gift of tongues?**” Well, if you read the theologians, they do disagree. Some think the gift of tongues means that if I speak in English and you understand in Polish, that's the gift of tongues, which may be a gift of tongues, and that may be the way that some people understood the gospel in the Acts of the Apostles. That would not be wrong. But that's not the **only** gift of tongues. St. Paul also talks about angelic tongues. Well, that will be a special kind. What does that mean? Actually, I don't know. I don't think anyone does. But surely there is a kind of tongues, a gift of tongues, which is really **a form of prayer whereby the facilities of speech are negated or held in suspension by sounds that are not words so that the mind can be freed from its typical slavery to words.** Just think about yourself for a minute. Is it not true when you are by yourself you are thinking in words? Is it not true that if you really sat, even deliberately wanted to pray, and wanted to clear your mind of all thoughts, that would be nearly impossible? And would not your thoughts come to you in the form of words? Is there any other way you actually experience thinking except in inner talk? I don't think so. But if you think about this, you realize in a sense **we are barraged constantly with inner talk and restless mindedness that makes it impossible for us to rest in the Spirit.** The gift of tongues, **one of the gift of tongues, is a gift that simply allows us to rest our minds.** Why? Because **we fill our minds up and our tongue and our voice box with sounds that are not words.** That is a gift. That's one explanation. I'm not saying it's the only one.

What about these other gifts? **What about healing?** We see Jesus healed all the time. Jesus said to his disciples, “Greater things than I have done you shall do also.” Most believers, most baptized believers, if you ask them, “Well, can you heal people?” they say, “Well, no. I couldn’t do that. Oh, no, but, well, maybe Padre Pio could.” Now Padre Pio has passed on, so now you can pray to Padre Pio, but in the old days they would write to Padre Pio. “Oh, Padre Pio, please pray for us. We need a miracle.” But Jesus said, “Greater things than I have done you shall do also.” Why don’t we consider healing to be a proper ministry that belongs to the body of the Church? Now maybe you personally are not called to any sort of overt healing ministry, but **should we not think of ministry as something belonging naturally and normally in every body of believers?**

Teaching—teaching. Every once in a while we have these very, very heroic people who say, “I will teach RE.” That’s heroic! It really is heroic. But often, most of the time, whenever discussing anything of our faith we say, “Well, I don’t know about that,” which is fine if it’s just pure humility; but it also can be a lack of confidence in the Spirit’s gift. Now, again, not everyone is called to teach, but the idea that is found in this book and the **idea that is stated at the Council is everybody is called to something; there is a gift for everybody.** There has got to be a gift for everyone. No one is baptized without a vocation. No one is confirmed without a vocation.

Now in the Scholastic methodology actual, specific qualities or virtues were attached to specific sacraments. That’s not the way of modern times. In modern times we think of **Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist together as the sacraments of initiation, and they are mediating the Holy Spirit and the gift of the Spirit and the Baptism in the Spirit all the time.** The first thing about the Baptism in the Spirit, as I mentioned already, is the experience of **life with power**, not worldly power, but life with power, with energy, life with a sense of direction. That’s the first thing that is given in the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Secondly, gifts, manifold gifts, something for everyone. So we need to study these gifts and to realize how important they are.

What is discernment? Discernment is a gift, perhaps rarer than others, to really **see differences.** What is good for this community? What is good for this family? Parents have to exercise discernment all the time. The larger the community, the more difficult it is. **You can’t have authority without discernment.** If you did, it would be arbitrary; and arbitrary authority is tyranny. Do we have tyranny in our society? Well, maybe we do! If we don’t have the gift of discernment in our rulers, we have tyranny.

What other gifts do we have? Prophecy. **What is prophecy?** Well, that’s a weird one; I don’t want to have anything to do with that! Prophecy—no! What is prophecy? It means speaking for God. Why don’t we speak for God to one another? We do know—we do know—in our own hearts what we should say to one another. Sometimes we are almost forced to say something, but we often want to shy away. We don’t want to reveal our faith. Why? The gift of prophecy is a gift of **speaking for God to others.**

Interpreting. Interpreting is similar to prophecy. **It’s explaining something.**

Evangelizing. For too long in our Christian communities, in our Catholic community, we have let evangelizing be the providence of priests and nuns. “Oh, they can do this. They can teach. They can evangelize,” and so on. Well, we can see that we will not survive as a Church if that’s what we do. Pope Paul VI wrote a marvelous apostolic exhortation called *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. He said the sad thing is **a lot of Catholics are sacramentalized, but they aren’t evangelized.** Isn’t that a shame? Why are they sacramentalized? Well, because the Church from an early time decided to accept everybody with open arms. If you want to be baptized, we will baptize you. Now you are supposed to promise, but what is the promise? **What does it mean to rear your children in the practice of the faith?** Does it mean to send them to school? Does it mean to send them to Church? Does it mean just to bring them to Church? **It’s really a great challenge to rear them with a sense of who God is so that they know who their father is.** So evangelizing means really **spreading the good news, being good news.** We can do that—we can do that!

I don’t want to go into Marriage and celibacy right now.

Now if we are going to accept the premise that all the gifts are rooted in the sacraments of initiation, then the question is going to arise: Well, then **what happens to people who have received all their sacraments, but who don’t experience the power of the Spirit?** Why is that? Or who don’t have any gifts—why is that? Well, in order to answer that question I think we have to go back to the other word—Holy Spirit and “**fire!**”

Now **fire for Christ was his own passion. Fire for the Church was the persecutions** that came from the very beginning in the opposition of others who were themselves also believers. When the Jewish people rejected Christ, we have to keep this in mind, they did this out of their own faith. This is a great mystery. They did this out of their own faith. St. Paul himself is puzzled by this, but Jewish people have faith. Muslim people have faith. They have faith in God. Somehow you cannot discredit this. And **through faith there was persecution of early believers,** naturally speaking. Paul was the greatest persecutor! He is the greatest witness of how that worked. He didn’t understand himself. He said, “Well, I was doing what I thought God wanted me to do.” Later on he changed his mind because he experienced the Spirit in a new, powerful way, and the risen Christ; but he realized his other brothers didn’t. Why? We don’t know why. He said it’s a mystery, having to do with God’s desire to include all nations in his **new covenant, which is reconciliation between God and humanity.**

Now soon after the Church was born, the Church went through another **great crisis: the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.** That destruction was incomparable to Jewish people, and it created **a great division** among Jewish people: those who later became the **Talmudic Jews and those who became Christians.** I differ from many historians believing that many, many Jews became Christians in the early Church. You read some history books: the impression is, well, most of them were Gentiles. I don’t think so. Raymond Brown, before he died—he was a great Catholic scholar—said that one of the great problems in modern times is not recognizing the great importance of

Judaism in the early Church, that **most of the early Christians were Jews**. But they no longer called themselves Jews, because Judea didn't exist after the Romans obliterated it. They renamed it Palestine. To this day there is this **animosity and bitterness between Palestinians and Jews. It started then. The Temple was destroyed.**

The Church's understanding of those events is found partly in Peter and partly in Hebrews. In Hebrews it says, well, you know: The earthly Temple isn't the real Temple anyway. **The real Temple was the one in heaven. Jesus the high priest is there in heaven.** But then on earth the living people, the believers, are living stones who are being built up in an edifice, which is a temple reflecting that heavenly temple in which the very one sacrifice of Christ is renewed in the Eucharist, for which reason the ministers of the Eucharist start to be called "priests." So you see how that all developed. This was a **theological interpretation of an event which was traumatic, horrifying.** That was a baptism of fire, too, enduring that.

The **Jews had their baptism of fire** as well, but they answered it differently. You know about **Masada**. You know about **Bar Kokhba**, or you may know about Bar Kokhba, who led a **rebellion against the Romans**—later, quite a bit after the Temple was destroyed. That is really what **led to the obliteration of Judea**. So there are **different ways of dealing with historical realities, and the baptism of fire is the historical reality, too, and the Spirit leading believers through it.**

Now as long as persecution remained—and the persecution was empowered mostly by the Roman empire, not by the Jews—as long as persecution remained and as long as for me to be baptized meant I could be killed tomorrow, **the only people who were baptized were people with sincere intentions and convictions and desires.** But once all the persecution stopped, and Constantine stopped the persecutions in 313 AD, not because he was converted—he wasn't converted, his mother was; and after all, even an emperor, how are you going to persecute your mother! Historians don't acknowledge this, but that's what happened. He realized his mother was a devout Catholic and how was he going to continue to persecute the Church? But not only that, but he realized his empire was falling apart and decided, well, maybe the Christians could help him. He was just a shrewd politician! Talk about prudence—he was prudent. Faithful? No, he was baptized on his deathbed! It was probably an insurance policy. He was shrewd.

But once **Constantine freed the Church, now being a Christian didn't cost anything.** That was the beginning of a problem that we are still dealing with. If it doesn't cost anything to be baptized, if it doesn't cost anything to be confirmed, if it doesn't cost anything to gather together, well, then who is going to come? Who is going to receive this? Well, anybody might for any reason at all, especially if it becomes socially acceptable to become Christian. So we see that the sacraments of initiation and the power associated with them, **the charisms, and the experience started to fade away.** Already we see this in the writings of John Chrysostom, who was shortly after Constantine. He says, you know—he speaks rather wistfully—he says sometimes I look at the Church and I think of her as an old lady, who has lost all of her beauty and who just has some old jewelry to remind her of what it used to be like. So we see in him and many other writers

this **awareness that something is missing in our initiation.** The rites are still there, but the experience isn't there anymore. People are missing something. The charisms are missing.

Then comes this very **unfortunate development of Scholastic theology** where some of these gifts are called "*charismata*," whereas in Greek, of course, *charismata* means gifts; so all gifts are *charismata*: love, faith—they are *charismata*—but all of a sudden, no, only certain gifts are ***charismata*, and they are not too important anymore, and the sanctifying gifts—those are more important.** If you think about it, **How is a person edified, except by service?** Is that not a Christian belief? I have heard people tell me that when they start to be a Eucharistic minister or they take communion to the shut-ins or something, they say, "Father, thank you so much for letting me do this." I might thank them for doing this. "Oh, don't, I don't want you to thank me! I get so much out of this." Yes, **we are edified and we are sanctified by the ministry we perform. It is rooted in our initiation into Christ, and it belongs to everybody.** Not everyone in the same way, of course, but it belongs to everybody. So that's something to keep in mind.

Now after the Scholastic problems, later on we have another problem develop in the **Reformation.** In the Reformation the two great reformers, **Luther and Calvin,** in their understanding of grace **unfortunately did not believe in free will.** They believed in grace, but not free will. Luther believed in free will only insofar as you choose oatmeal cookies or chocolate chip. He said you have free will to do that; but when it comes to God, you have no free will. If God gives you grace, you have to accept it. You are **not free to accept or reject grace.** So whatever you have, you have because God gave it to you; and what you don't have, you don't have because God didn't give it to you. Well, if you think about that, that's not very nice. That's not very hopeful. Calvin went farther, but we don't have to go into that. The point is there is a certain sort of idea that the person, the believer, is totally passive in regard to gifts, totally passive in regard to everything. So, actually, we can't help it if we are coldhearted. Well, too bad, you can't help it! I can't help it if, well, I don't have any gifts. God didn't give me any!

When you get to the United States, even before the United States was united, when you get to the early colonies, Pilgrims, and Puritans were Calvinists. You had this desperate act called the **"Half-way Covenant" with Cotton Mather.** Cotton Mather said, well—they had a rule. They said if you don't feel the warmth of the Spirit in your heart, you can't be part of our church. The time came when nobody felt it. Nobody felt it at all! There was nobody left in church. So Cotton Mather said, okay, if your parents felt it, you can come in. That was called the "Half-way Covenant." Now later, in the late 1700's in what is called the Great Awakening, Wesley and so on came over and in that great event of the **Great Awakening they started to realize that there was something to this free will—**there was something to free will. You can read about it or learn about it at Wheaton College. There is a whole room in the museum about evangelizing and the Great Awakening and why these doctrines arose and why they fell. It is interesting to notice that **the most extreme Protestant teachings are not believed by anybody anymore except small, little groups.** But most people have rejected them because they are not right.

Now there were three events that took place: one in Armenia—that's northeast of Turkey, northwest of Iraq—Armenia, one in London, and one in Kansas in the early 1900's. That was the shaking of a room of people with the power of the Holy Spirit. People came alive and they started speaking in tongues, which hadn't been heard for centuries. It happened in three places. From those three places it branched out and became—and started happening elsewhere—and this is called the **“Pentecostal Movement.”** Pentecostalism grew and grew and grew, but it had some very odd aspects to it, but the one thing it had it was a **return to the idea that the Holy Spirit is really alive and really active among believers.**

Now the Pentecostals were not always liked or accepted by the Evangelicals or by the Fundamentalists, because they were called “crypto Catholics.” Why? Well, because they said things the Catholics said, like for example, **when I read the Bible, I ask the Holy Spirit to inspire me so I understand the text.** I don't want to go into this, but the Catholic understanding is that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church, so there is a **harmony between the feeling and the knowledge and the teaching of the Church and what is in Scripture.** One interprets the other, so to speak. The Pentecostals had that certain sense of harmony too, whereas the Evangelicals said, no, everything is in the words of the Bible itself, so no Spirit needs to interpret anything. In fact, Evangelicals tend to downgrade these gifts. So the **Pentecostal Movement grew outside of the Catholic Church.**

Then in the late 60's it started moving into the Catholic Church and into the Lutheran Church and into the Presbyterian Church and into all the Churches. Now is this movement the same thing that was being discussed at Vatican II? It's an aspect of it, but not the whole thing. **What Vatican II was talking about was the renewal of Christian life; and the Charismatic Renewal may be a form of that, but it's not the whole of that.** So we don't want to identify the Holy Spirit with a movement. **The Holy Spirit is not a movement.** Movements come and go. The Holy Spirit doesn't come and go, but in a sense the influence of the Holy Spirit does go if people become closed. So that's what I want to impress on you tonight, is the **need for openness.**

Someone asked me a question: “Can you pray for gifts?” Of course you can because you have free will, and **if you have a natural desire for a gift, that natural desire comes from God too.** It doesn't have to be a supernatural grace. **St. Thomas** has a very beautiful teaching on grace, actual grace, in which he says God works in two ways—he didn't mean only two ways, but he talked about two ways. One he calls **“operant grace,” where God puts an idea in your head.** God gives you a desire. You never had it; all of a sudden you desire something or you have an insight—you never saw that before; all of a sudden you see something. Oh, okay! That's the grace, operant grace. There is another kind of grace called **“co-operant grace.”** That means **in your own humanity you have a wholesome, holy desire.** You want to help somebody. You want to do something, and God gives you the strength to do it, to see it through, or gives you ideas of how to do it. That's co-operative grace. **So in regard to the gifts, yes, if you have a desire, ask the Lord to fulfill it for you.** If you want to heal people, ask the Lord to make you a healer.

Ask the Lord to anoint your hands. Ask the Lord to give you a heart that burns with concern for other people. **But watch what you ask for, though. Just be careful.**

Most of all, I think it's important that we **avail ourselves of the fullness the Spirit wants to bestow on us. Now is there any one way to do this? No**, there is not any one way to do this. I have heard of people driving down the road struck with the most extraordinary feeling of the presence of God, overwhelmed, perhaps even crying. And I have watched their lives develop after that event, and it is a life-changing event. Where did it come from? The Holy Spirit. But we believe, I believe, Cardinal Suenens believed, Joseph Ratzinger used to believe, anyway—I don't know if he still does—that all that goes back to our Baptism. **Our Baptism is the gift of the Spirit.** We don't baptize anyone without invoking the Spirit over the water. **It's just we don't open up the gift.** We don't unpack what the Lord wants to do for us. **To grow in the Spirit requires discipline.** It requires **time**. We have to **dedicate ourselves to prayer. We have to learn the work.** We can't do whatever we think is right; that's not discernment. It really helps to have friends. **It helps to have a circle of other believers you can work with, pray with.**

But if anything, I would like to convince you of the need that we all have for, not only once in our lives, but **constantly to ask for the Spirit's anointing for the present moment, whatever moment we are in.** Our lives are constantly changing. Let the Spirit anoint us with the gift of this particular time. We need to **honor our own lives, respect what God is doing, see what God is unfolding before us. It does really require submission and surrender**—no particular words, but some will help.

So toward that end, **I would invite you just to close your eyes and I will pray with you.** I will say words. If those words resonate with your heart, you can make them your own. If you would rather pray some other words, you pray your own words. **Now I am going to pray to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, because that's how we always pray.**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, through your Son, Jesus, who died on the cross for us, who died that we could be free from all forms of slavery to sin, to vengeance, to self, to self-will, to self-love, to fear, to pleasure, to every kind of false good and limited good, I ask through your mercy and through the mercy you manifest in him that you fill my heart right now with the fullness of his Spirit, with the fullness of the Spirit of God. And fill my heart with all the gifts that I need to live out my vocation, the gifts I need to manifest the good news to others, the gifts I need to live a virtuous life, the gifts I need to trust in your daily providence, to hope in the glorious future that you have promised, and most of all, to love with your love. Father, help my heart to be in contact with your heart. Help me love my enemies and forgive those who have hurt me or rejected me, who have abandoned me, who have betrayed me. Let my love for others fill me to the point of suffering as they suffer. Help that love bring healing to others, filling them with your power and your life. Lord, help me pray, without words or with

words, aloud and in silence. Help me enjoy your presence. Help me speak your message to others. Help it take root in me. In Jesus' name, we pray.