

The Holy Spirit can seem strange to many of us Catholics. We believe in the Spirit, of course, but we aren't sure how He touches our lives concretely. Today on Pentecost I want to speak about the role the Holy Spirit's inspirations play in our happiness. Some of these ideas are from a book by Fr. Jacques Philippe -- In the School of the Holy Spirit.

I want to begin with a quotation from the diary of St. Faustina, the young Polish visionary of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: "It is easy to become holy," she said, "it just takes a little good will! And if Jesus finds this . . . good will in a soul, He quickly gives Himself to her . . . and if the soul is faithful to this grace from God, she can in a short time reach the highest level of holiness. The shortest road is faithfulness to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit."

Again: "The shortest road (to holiness) is faithfulness to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit." A few weeks ago I spoke about infused prayer as the way to holiness. But if I want to grow in holiness it's necessary not only to know what to do during prayer, but how to love, because holiness is simply letting God, who is Love, into my life. So I want to use this Pentecost homily to make three points about how the Holy Spirit inspires and guides us to that love.

But, first, what do inspirations of the Holy Spirit feel like? I want to answer that big question by quoting again from St. Faustina's diary: One day she wrote the following, "This evening I felt sicker than usual . . . I was going to bed. But as I went into my cell suddenly I felt inwardly that I had to go to Sister X's cell because she needed help. I went straight to her cell and Sister X said, "Oh, how good it is . . . that God sent you. . . Sister, please bring me a little tea with lemon, because I'm so thirsty and . . . I'm suffering so much." I settled her more comfortably and quenched her thirst with a little tea. When I went back into my cell, my soul was penetrated with a great love for God and I understood that we should pay great attention to inner inspirations and follow them faithfully. And faithfulness to one grace attracts others."

One of the main ways the Holy Spirit works in our lives, then, is not by dramatic spiritual phenomena, but through inspirations to little, ordinary acts of charity like Faustina's helping of her sick sister. There is nothing extraordinary in such inspirations. We all receive them. An idea just seems to pop into our head to help this person, or call that person, or speak a kind word to a co-worker who is sad, etc. These thoughts come to our minds quickly and delicately. But we often (usually?) reject them out of laziness, busyness, embarrassment, or hardness of heart. If we only knew that in doing so we are rejecting the Holy Spirit's invitation to holiness! If we will only accept the little inspirations and invitations to love the other person, then, like St. Faustina, we will feel consoled – by the Consoler Himself. And love enters our life more deeply. That is our holiness and happiness.

My first point: these inspirations snowball if we let them! (So does sin, of course, but we already know that. One sin begets many others). But grace also snowballs in our spiritual lives. As St. Faustina said, "[F]aithfulness to one grace attracts others!" It is a law of the Holy Spirit: each act of fidelity to an inspiration is rewarded by more graces and more frequent and stronger inspirations. If we cooperate with the Spirit, the soul is very gradually, but with increasing rapidity and power, drawn into greater faithfulness to God, a clearer understanding of His will, and greater ability to say, "Yes!" to Him.

A second point: we need to pay attention to the Spirit's inspirations because life can be very complicated. We can try to fight on all spiritual fronts. But the Holy Spirit will tell us by His inspirations which virtue, or commandment we should give special priority to at any given moment. Otherwise we may waste our efforts because we can't do anything without God's grace. Maybe at this moment He wants us to concentrate our efforts elsewhere. We may not be strong enough, right now, to defeat a particular sin directly. But if we are faithful to the promptings of the Spirit we will outflank our weaknesses.

This is another spiritual law: we will get the grace to be faithful in important things that right now are too much for us, if we're faithful to the little things that are within our power. God always gives us the strength to do what He commands, but in His own way and time. This doesn't mean that we can trade obedience in little things for ignoring our big sins. Rather, I'm saying that by obedience to these little graces we will get the strength to conquer even our toughest sins. I've seen this many times. A person upon conversion can't immediately end a sinful habit he is caught in. But as this person seeks to do God's will faithfully in other matters he eventually gains that strength.

Finally, we need to follow the inspirations of the Holy Spirit because, while there are general principles and common traits on the road to sanctity, I don't know what my own personal holiness will look like, at least not at the beginning. The shape of my own holiness is only revealed to me slowly, by degrees, as I live life. And it probably is very different from what I imagine, or would like, it to be.

A great obstacle on our path to holiness may be our clinging to an image we have of our own perfection that is not in God's plan for us at all. What God wants for us can be very disconcerting, but ultimately more beautiful, because God created each of us to be a unique spiritual masterpiece – and He alone knows how to get us there. And He shows us the way by these bread crumbs of charity, little inspirations on the path of our daily lives – which, if we accept them, lead us, one step at a time, to Him.

The path of obedience to these inspirations of the Spirit may be very demanding because the Holy Spirit is trying to lead us down the path to radical holiness – to becoming saints. But as hard as it is, it will be a path of freedom and happiness even if it looks dark and difficult at the beginning. If we can travel it with trust, our hearts will expand and this enlarging of our souls to greater love is a clear sign that we are traveling with the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is not as mysterious, strange, or as far away as we imagine. He speaks to our hearts every day. And one drop of His grace will fill them with more contentment than anything the world offers us. For what satisfies our hearts is not so much the gifts we receive, but the good that the Holy Spirit inspires in us -- and that we then do. This Pentecost let us resolve to allow the Holy Spirit to change our lives by saying, "Yes!" to all those little whispers of charity in our souls.