**THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MARY**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

In this final meditation, I would like to invite you to contemplate the One who allows us to live the **mysticism** of our life to the full in all its dimensions, because it is he who makes possible our *divinisation* as participation in the Trinitarian Life through our personal configuration with Jesus Christ: **the Holy Spirit**.

The Spirit is a fundamental reality in our human, Christian and religious life; unfortunately, particularly in the Western Church, the Holy Spirit still remains as “the great Unknown”. The Eastern Churches have much to teach us in this regard, so that we can breathe, as Pope St John Paul II said, “with the two lungs” of Christian life and theology. Precisely because the presence and action of the Holy Spirit is emphasised much more in them, they have also developed the paradigm of the **divinisation of the human being**, as the culmination of the wonderful project of the Triune God, much more than in the West,

Being a very broad topic, I should limit myself only to the presence of the Holy Spirit *in the Salesian Charism*; even more concretely: to the *mention of the Holy Spirit in the Constitutions*.

**2. THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CONSTITUTIONS**

First of all, it is worth remembering that these are not only *legal*  texts (with the importance that this means), but also **charismatic**  texts. As *Vita Consecrata states magnificently,* “When the Church approves a form of consecrated life or an Institute, *she confirms* that in its spiritual and apostolic charism are found all the objective requisites for achieving personal and communal perfection according to the Gospel” (VC 93).

It is clear that this approval is usually identified with the approval of the Congregation’s Constitutions. We have, therefore, the *confirmation* of the Church which assures us that our Charism is a path of evangelical perfection in love, called upon to be assumed by each Salesian Confrere in a personal manner.

Undoubtedly, it would be much more enriching to present not only the Holy Spirit in the Constitutions, but a complete view of the “**Trinitarian theology**” they contain: the way the Father, the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are presented. For now, according to our theme, we are only presenting the mission and action of the Spirit; even faced with the complete richness of articles, we will only show this specific aspect.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales is very strong and significant.

The action of the Holy Spirit is manifested, above all, in the life of our holy Father Don Bosco: “Through the motherly intervention of Mary, the Holy Spirit **raised up** St John Bosco... **formed** within him the heart of a father and teacher” (C. 1); He filled him with the gifts of nature and grace (C. 21). *Gift of the Holy Spirit* is the Preventive System (C. 20). Don Bosco, in response, always lived in an attitude of **docility** to the Holy Spirit (which is accentuated with regard to prayer: C. 86).

In the likeness of our Father, “From this active presence of the Holy Spirit we draw strength for our fidelity and support for our hope” (C. 1); hence we are invited to be attentive to his presence in us (C. 12).

+ The consecration the Father makes of us is realised “through the gift of his Spirit”, to send us out “to be apostles of the young” (C. 3).

+ He makes us sharers in the life of Christ in the Spirit (C. 60), and continues his work of formation in us, as with the disciples (C. 96).

+ As with Don Bosco, he grants us *personal gifts* (C. 22), he guides us by being **light and strength**: this is how we proclaim him and ask him in the *prayer* of Religious Profession (C. 24): light for our intelligence, to know what God wants from us, and strength for our will, to be able to realise what we have discovered through discernment as God’s plan for us: in this way he leads us “into the fullness of truth” (C. 96).

+ The Holy Spirit **sanctifies us**, because he is ‘a lasting source of grace and a support for his daily efforts to grow towards the perfect love1 of God and human beings”, so that we can bring the best possible gift to those to whom we are sent: our own **holiness** (C. 25).

Our attitude before the Holy Spirit is characterised by a number of specific traits, which we can summarise in three closely related words: **listening - attention - docility**.

\* **Listening - attention**: The Holy Spirit makes us hear his **voice** (C. 2), to carry out Don Bosco’s apostolic project. This listening constitutes the foundation of formation as an *ongoing personal attitude*: since, in pastoral work, the Salesian “tries to discern the voice of the Spirit in the events of each day, and so acquires the ability to learn from life’s experiences” (C. 119). Article 64 speaks of this attention in a very interesting context, that of **obedience**: “Docile to the Spirit and attentive to the signs he gives us in the events of each day...”

The importance of this attitude is emphasised in particular situations, the most relevant of which is the General Chapter, through which “the entire Society, opening itself to the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, seeks to discern God’s will at a specific moment in history for the purpose of rendering the Church better service” (C. 146).

\* Intimately united to these attitudes is **docility**: we are “a community of the baptized. *Submissive to the bidding of the Spirit*...’ (C. 2) to carry out our Mission. Article 64 links it to attentiveness, and Article 99 presents it as a fundamental attitude of formation: “Docile to the Holy Spirit, (the Salesian) develops his talents and his gifts of grace in a constant effort of conversion and renewal.”

Finally, as an all-encompassing attitude, which is a determining factor of the “Grace of Unity” for the Salesian and his community, we are invited to **make life, prayer, learning to encounter God *through those to whom we are sent*. “By discovering the fruits of the Spirit in the lives of people, especially the young”** (C. 95), we fully live our relationship with God.

This reflection leads us to conclude, with *Vita Consecrata*, that in our Salesian charism “The **deepest meaning** of the evangelical counsels is revealed when they are viewed in relation to the Holy Trinity, the source of holiness” (VC 21); and to confirm what is stated further on: ‘When the Church approves a form of consecrated life or an Institute, she confirms that in its spiritual and apostolic charism are found **all the objective requisites** for achieving personal and communal perfection according to the Gospel” (VC 93).

And it is not unimportant that the Rector Major, in his justification of the theme of GC29, says that it makes “reference to the **centrality of God (as Trinity)”**, which means that there is a need to rediscover the Triune God as the foundation of being passionate about Jesus Christ.

**3. MARY, “BRIDE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”**

At the apex of this reflection, indeed of all the reflections offered on this subject, I would like to emphasise certain aspects in which Our Lady is *an example and model* of our relationship with the Holy Spirit; consequently, we can say that she is the fullest example of the **mysticism** of the Christian life.

Firstly, we find a very interesting “*pneumatological inclusion”* in the New Testament: the first time Mary is mentioned, and the last time, she is always in full relationship with the Holy Spirit: *the Annunciation and Pentecost*. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Lk 1:35). “All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers” (Acts 1:14), waiting for the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, we find in Mary the most beautiful example of **“Trinitarian relationship”** which, in the light of what was said earlier, does not distance her from us, but invites us to imitate her. In the prayers to Our Lady, one perceives a *differentiated relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*; in such a way, that the three deepest “relationships” of the human being are attributed to Her: **Daughter - Bride - Mother**. Without ignoring the fact that they have a special meaning and density in her, in a *similar* way we too are invited to live our relationship not so much with “God” in the abstract and singular, but with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: a relationship of love and friendship, enabling us to experience his presence in every moment of our lives.

At this point, I would like to return to the three attitudes that are essential in our relationship with the Holy Spirit and of which Mary was an example: **listening - attention - docility**.

In particular, I would like to emphasise her attitude of *listening*, manifested in her ability to *experience events in depth* , in order to be able to *discern* what the Spirit wants to communicate to her, and thus *collaborate* fully with him. “But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2:19, *et passim*). The two verbs indicating Mary's attitude are: **συνετερει - διετηρει**. Both have the same root: **τηρειν** which is translated as *reserve, preserve, guard, reflect*. But most important are *the prefixes:* **συν - δια.** The former always speaks of *union, together*; while the latter means: *through...*

In this way, if we want to summarise Mary’s attitude, we can say that it is twofold: *in experiencing these facts/words*, she tries to see them *as a whole* (not in isolation, or separating them), *understanding them more deeply in themselves*, in order to understand their meaning. This is undoubtedly **discernment** in its briefest yet fullest expression. And it is very significant that in both cases it is stated that this discernment has its centre *in her heart*! (**εν τη καρδια αυτης**).

Let us finish by asking Mary, Mother of Jesus and our Mother, that we too may be docile to the Holy Spirit, listening to his Voice and collaborating with him in his work, which consists in bringing to the fullness of truth and love all those who “are Christ’s”; moreover, all of humanity, especially the girls and boys whom the Lord wants to entrust to us.

At the end of our Retreat, let us ask our Father, through the maternal intercession of Mary, that we may allow ourselves to be configured every day to Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; and in this way, every moment and every action of our daily life lived in the mysticism of our Charism, may become an opportunity for growth in faith, hope and love, thus realising in our lives the wonderful project of the Triune God: **to make us full sharers in his Divine Life.**

Here is a text by St John Chrysostom on the Holy Spirit[[1]](#footnote-2):

If there were no Holy Spirit, we could not confess that Jesus is Lord. “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). If there were no Holy Spirit, we who are faithful could not pray to God the Father (cf. Rom 8:15, 26); we say: “Our Father, who art in heaven”. Just as we cannot say “Lord”, neither can we call God “Father”. How do we know? From the Apostle, who asserts: “Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father’” (Gal 4:6). If you call [God] “Father”, think that you were deemed worthy of that invocation by the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit there would be no word of wisdom and knowledge in the Church; to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit (1 Cor 12:8). If there were no Holy Spirit, there would be no pastors and doctors in the Church; they too are [instituted] by the Holy Spirit, as Paul specifies: “the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God” (Acts 20:28).

**Appendix**

**The Power of the HOLY SPIRIT**

“How is the Easter event made ‘ours’ today, accomplished once and for all? Through the same one who is the author of it from the beginning and in the fullness of time: *the Holy Spirit*. He is personally Newness in action, in the world. He is the Presence of God-with-us, “with our spirit” (Rom 8:16). Without him, God is far away; Christ is in the past; the Gospel is a dead letter; the Church, a mere organisation; authority, despotism; mission, propaganda; worship, an evocation; and Christian life, a slave morality. But, in the Holy Spirit and in permanent communion with him (in an inseparable synergy), the cosmos is uplifted and groans in the birth of the Kingdom; man remains in the struggle against the flesh; the risen Christ is present; the Gospel is the power of life; the Church signifies Trinitarian communion; authority is a liberating service; mission is a new Pentecost; the liturgy is memorial and anticipation; and the whole of Christian life is divinised.”[[2]](#footnote-3)

Without the Holy Spirit, *God* is not only far away, but infinitely distant. He is the Absolute, eternal and inaccessible, Creator and Lord who can and dominates all, who inspires respect and even awe, who astonishes and trembles with his infinity and who oppresses and crushes with his greatness. Is this not the image of God that has been offered to us so many times? But, with the Holy Spirit and because of him, God is infinite nearness, infinite tenderness, Love-Friendliness, living Presence, tender Mercy, Trinity-Family, mysterious Hearth, the great Friend of man, who wants his full human fulfilment, as his active co-worker, and who tremblingly respects his freedom. Therefore, our fundamental attitude before him is trembling adoration, unwavering faith in his Love, unlimited trust, active docility, unconditional adherence, responsible cooperation and grateful praise. *Adoration* is not slavery but “ecstasy of action”.

With the Holy Spirit, *God*, for us, is *Abba*. And we are, for him, little children, tenderly loved. *“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God*” (Eph 2:19). We truly belong to the Family of God, which is the Trinity. We are truly children of the Father; children in the Son; children of the Father in the Son through the action of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, St Paul writes, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, *Abba* Father! it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:14-16). “And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our[a] hearts, crying, *Abba*, Father! So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God” (Gal 4:6-7).

The Holy Spirit, by truly configuring us with Christ, who is the Only-Begotten of the Father and the Only-Begotten of the Virgin-Mother, truly makes us children in the Son, through a real participation in his Sonship; and, at the same time, unites with our own spirit to give us a living awareness of our divine and Marian filiation.

Without the Spirit, *Jesus* is simply a historical figure, who lived in the past – albeit a recent past – and who irretrievably belongs to that past; who certainly left us a magnificent example of life and a splendid doctrinal message; but nothing more. With the Spirit, on the other hand, Jesus Christ is infinitely alive and present and is the most actual person in the universe, contemporary with all human beings: more intimate to us than ourselves.

Without the Holy Spirit, *the Gospel* is a book and ultimately a dead letter. With the Spirit, the Gospel is a living, life-giving Person, whose word is the force and power of life, who enlightens everything, who gives meaning to everything, and who is capable of transforming man and the whole of society from within. With the Spirit, the Gospel is eternally relevant.

Without the Spirit, *the Church* is nothing more than a mere organisation, similar to many other human organisations and institutions existing in the world of human beings. An institution with cultural, humanitarian and, above all, religious purposes. But nothing else. However, with the Holy Spirit, the Church is, with all the rigour of the word, *mystery*: historical and social realisation of God’s salvific plan for humankind, *sacrament of Christ*, visible presence of the invisible Christ, new *corporeality* of the Incarnate Word, instrument of the same Spirit in the salvation of humankind. With the Spirit, the Church is a *Communion* of life with God in Jesus Christ, which becomes a communion of life with human beings. With the Spirit *the Church means and is Trinitarian communion*: family participation in the family life of God-Trinity. And, in a vigorous analogy, something very similar should be said of a religious congregation. In any case, we can ask ourselves: *what predominates* in it, the *charismatic dimension* or the *institutional dimension*? Because, in truth, it is not a question of “opposing”, but rather of “integrating” dimensions that are essential, but do not have the same value and importance.

Without the Spirit of Jesus, *authority* is *power* and domination. Has it not been understood, so many times, in the Church, in open contrast with the Gospel itself? Didn’t the jurists really call it *dominant power*? Power and domination are an assault on the human person, because they oppress and enslave, creating dependency and servility. Without the Spirit, authority becomes authoritarianism or permissiveness. With the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, authority is *diakonia*, a humble service of love to our brothers and sisters and, therefore, an authentic service of deliverance which guarantees and promotes the true freedom of God’s children.

Without the Spirit, the *mission* remains mere propaganda, advertising, even if it is the announcement of transcendental truths for humankind. Without the Spirit, the “*apostolate*” is a human, charitable or welfare activity – and sometimes mere activism – but it ceases to be a true apostolate and, consequently, a truly salvific action. With the Holy Spirit, however, the mission is mystical, because it is an action of the same Spirit through us, and it becomes a new Pentecost.

Without the Holy Spirit, *worship* is a series of rites and ceremonies and the liturgy is a representation empty of content and life, a mere evocation or memory of events that belong to the past. With the Spirit, worship is life and the liturgy is a living memory and real actualisation of the entire mystery of Christ: Incarnation-life-passion-death-resurrection. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, the liturgy is the personal action of Christ who revives and actualises, with us and for us, his entire mystery.

Without the Spirit, the “Christian” life ceases to be truly *Christian*, because it is no longer life in Christ and from Christ; and it also ceases to be truly *spiritual*, because it is not a life in the Spirit and from the Spirit. And morality becomes “slave morality”. With the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, life is truly *Christian and spiritual*, taking these adjectives in their most rigorous and profound sense: For Christ and the Spirit are truly the authentic protagonists of this life, and man – the human person, male or female – *allows himself/herself to be guided, “to live” and be vivified by Them*, thus reaching the highest summit of humanisation and divinisation.

This brief *analysis* can serve somewhat as a *test*, to know how far we really are *Christian and spiritual*, in the strong sense of these words. And, above all, as a perspective, that is, as looking ahead: towards what we must be and towards what we must live, regardless of whether we have lived it up to this point or not (cf. Phil 3:14).

1. St John Chrusostom, *De Sancta Pentecoste I,* PG 50, 458.

   In: KARL CHRISTIAN FELMY, LA *Teologia Ortodossa Contemporanes,* Ed. Quiriniana 1999, 169 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. *The Power of the Spirit – from the Speech to the Third World Assembly of Churches, Uppsala, 1968*

   Ignatius IV Hazim [Habib Hazim] (1921 – 2012), Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Latakia and Primate of the Church of Antioch. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)