

HOW CAN I TELL WHEN THE SPIRIT IS AT WORK?

I remember being asked to be the Confirmation sponsor for my niece and was honored not only to be asked but to be able to concelebrate the Mass. After I sponsored her I was able to go back to my seat in the sanctuary and then simply watch the young people receive the sacrament of sealing with God's own Spirit. I watched as one elderly man, the grandfather of one of the Confirmandi was having difficulty getting out of his pew. Those to be confirmed were in the front pews and their sponsors were in the section of pews behind them. They would come together at the head of the center aisle just where the bishop was. The responsibility of the sponsor was to place their right hand upon the shoulder of the one being confirmed.

The grandfather in this instance had had a stroke and his left arm was paralyzed at his waist. His right hand held a cane with a four-pronged base for balance and support. When the grandfather stood behind his grandson it was clear that he was not going to be able to place his hand on the lad's shoulder. The priest who was taking the cards with the Confirmation names on them realized what was happening and stepped down, placed his own right arm around the grandfather's shoulder and his left hand on the lad's shoulder. When the bishop finished the lad got up quickly and headed across the front of the church. His grandfather had a bit more difficulty turning and then moving. The young man suddenly realized his grandfather was not with him, stopped at the end of the pew and waited for him to catch up. They then walked together back to their pews.

Although the sacrament of Confirmation was what commanded our attention what was unfolding right before our eyes was the Holy Spirit at work. What was it that prompted that young fellow to ask his granddad to stand for him? What about the grandfather? It was so evident that he desired to be able to stand as sponsor. Where did that prompting come from? The priest who was busy about the collecting of name cards, how quickly he grasped what the situation was and what exactly was needed to make it better. Where did that sensitivity come from? The lad being confirmed got it. The grandfather got it. The priest got it. Understanding. One of the Spirit's gifts. Wisdom. Knowledge. Knowing just the right thing to do in the situation. More signs of the presence of the Spirit.

All of these are gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to you and to me already. Poured out. The workings are subtle. The promptings feel like they are coming from within me. They are. Because that is where the Spirit abides. The Spirit indwells your soul, that deepest part of you. The Spirit always takes the initiative and the Spirit always desires a response from us. The only appropriate response to the Holy Spirit is cooperation. Our task is always to respond willingly.

We need to be looking for the signs of the Spirit's presence and activity. I have just identified a few. What are some others? When your fears disappear. That is the result of working of the Holy Spirit. When an addiction no longer has its hold on you after dominating your life for a time. There was a time in my own life when I did not think that I could live without taking a drink of alcohol. That was a lie but it was lie that I believed. But there came a day when I did not want to do that anymore. God's Spirit freed me from holding onto something that was destroying me. That was twenty years ago. It has been taken away. I have been freed. All this by the power

of the Holy Spirit. When you find yourself moved to be the uniting force in a situation where people are at odds with each other, that is due to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This is true whether the place is at home, in the community, the parish or at work.

But there are more instances. In a few moments I will extend my hands together over the gifts of bread and wine and ask for the Holy Spirit to come and transform these simple gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ. That transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit. But when I call upon the Spirit, where is the Spirit—except in you and in me? I call forth from you, in faith, the gift of the Spirit to transform the gifts you have presented here. If the Spirit can change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ then know that the Spirit can change hearts and minds and souls too. The power of the Spirit abides in you.

So, when we step back for a moment we can see that there are three phases in our relationship with the Holy Spirit. There is unawareness (The Spirit is within but I have no clue that I am supposed to cooperate); realization (I recognize that the Spirit is—and abides. I am sometimes conscious enough to know and realize this truth which enables me to cooperate with the promptings of the Spirit); surrender (It is no longer I who have the Spirit but now the Spirit has me. This is Mary at the annunciation when she says, “Let it be done to me as you say,” and the apostles in the Upper Room when they allow and welcome the Holy Spirit taking hold of them. They enter the room as frightened men and they leave proclaiming for all to hear the message of Jesus Christ. They had let go into the Spirit. They had surrendered into God’s hands.)

This last is the goal for each of us in this life. It is especially true for us now in this time of the coronavirus. The gifts of the Spirit we need and thanks be to God they have already been given. I place my trust in the Holy Spirit within my soul. I let go of myself and let God direct, let God lead, let God’s truth reign, let God rule in my life. There is a power let loose in the doing of this that cannot be had in any other way. It is the power of surrendering love, self-emptying love. Believing in the Holy Spirit is the best we can do. We can realize, discern, cooperate or we can live unaware. With our eyes closed. The Spirit bids us surrender. Why Not? What really stands in the way? It is Pentecost. Let the Spirit reign!